

# A CENTURY OF LONDON CO-OPERATION

BY

W. HENRY BROWN

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## FOREWORD.

*I have never contributed a foreword to any publication with more readiness and gladness than I do to this History of the London Co-operative Society.*

*The Education Committee deserve our thanks for so promptly using the opportunity which the amalgamations have afforded to weave the threads of Co-operative history in London into a constructive story.*

*The selection of the Author was indeed a happy one, for Mr. W. H. Brown has an unrivalled knowledge of both the tradition and facts of Co-operative development in the Metropolis. The lives of the Author, and his father, provide an intimate and continuous contact with Co-operative thought and action over two-thirds of the period covered in the book. He is rich in having personally known men like Lloyd Jones, Tom Hughes, and E. V. Neale, and having had the close friendship of J. M. Ludlow, G. J. Holyoake, E. O. Greening, Mr. Ben Jones, and a host of other personalities who have given their distinctive contribution to Co-operation in the Capital City.*

*The story vividly describes the vicissitude of Co-operation in London. The reaching out of the Pioneer minds beyond the possible response of their day and generation; the disillusionment and apparent failure because of the absence of material results at particular times; and eventually the emergence of the stimulating fact of the Indestructibility of the Idea.*

*The wonderful enthusiasm of London's early Co-operators caused them to make of Co-operation a magnificent declaration of principles. Perhaps a contributory cause of their failure was their inability to realise that however grand the Ideal it must touch the daily routine of life to become realisable.*

*Failure in the accepted sense dogged a multitude of early efforts until, through the travail of experience, Co-operation took root in the more modest and humble efforts of men and women whose names will never be read in our history books, but whose lives and deeds are just as intimately woven into the accomplishments of to-day as the thinkers whose names are known to us.*

*Even the policies which succeed often do so because of the character which opposition forms. So who can, or would wish, to assess the value of this or that contribution to the cause of progress?*

*As I read this History and the events which recall the past, a whole host of men and women who have played their part well appear to step into and emblazon its pages. Let us never forget that it is the mass of unrecorded efforts which largely contributes to the success of our great democratic movements.*

*History usually shines a strong light on the personality of the pioneers. Perhaps the most useful lesson which our Co-operative Pioneers teach us is to realise that they were men who broke with the traditions, customs, and dogmas of their day—and thought and acted for themselves.*

*Therefore let us, as Co-operators, keep our minds receptive to the knowledge that there is pioneering work to be done in each generation.*

*Although the progress made is exhilarating, London is not yet won for Co-operation. It is true that the foundations are being well laid, but the figures of membership, trade, and capital are infinitesimal to what they must become before we can say the Premier City of the World is the Co-operative Heart of a Co-operative Nation.*

*It was once told to me that Bismarck, when driving through the streets of London, said: "What a City to Sack!" I never ride through the miles of London's streets and survey the endless range of shops and businesses belonging to Private Enterprise, in which even to-day the infrequent Co-operative Store appears to be a democratic Oasis in the Desert of Capitalism, without thinking:—*

*"What a City to win to Co-operation!"*

*The London Co-operative Society is the material manifestation of the vision of those wonderful souls of a hundred years ago, and it is an instrument capable of completing our task. Truly, London Co-operators have a Past of which they are proud. The present is full of joyful achievement. Let us see to it that our future is Upwards, Onwards, towards the Co-operative Commonwealth.*

**ALFRED BARNES.**

## CHAPTER I.

# THE EMERGENCE OF THE IDEA.

THE Co-operative Conquest of London since the War has been the most significant Victory of the Peace. Ideals which seemed the phantoms of enthusiastic visionaries have become materialised—in shops, factories, rolling stock, and dividends. They are the tangible evidences of security and success, according to the accepted canons of the orthodox economists and the authorised exponents of the commercial creed.

In less than a decade the London Co-operative Society has encompassed the North, East, and West with a network of agencies for the daily service of over a million people. That is the beginning of a great and mighty Movement that, ere long, will be covering the Metropolis with a cloud of Co-operative witness and demonstrating the capacity of consumers to organise the feeding and clothing of their families, the furnishing of their homes, the provision of educational and recreative facilities, and the general protection of their interests.

To have attained such a vast result in so short a time seems suggestive of the miraculous. But the society is not of mushroom growth. It is the realisation of the efforts of those who, a hundred years ago, sought to apply the ideas of association in trade and manufacture; it is the response to the continuous stream of men and women who have striven to create a Co-operative Citadel within the Capital City of the Empire. They dug the foundations; they planned the structure; we are furnishing and finishing the edifice.

London life is as many sided as a diamond. Its facets have each their distinctive view. There is the historic London; another of Literature; every aspect of our national existence flows through its records. We associate the Capital City with its Statesmen and

Reformers ; we think of its rich commerce and varied industries ; of the Courts and the Crimè ; of the Business and Pleasure ; the silent squares and the squalid slums. This wonderful City of Contrasts and Contradictions is being permeated by the spirit of Co-operation. Its people are being welded in a common purpose of social welfare. A mutual concern has long lain deep down in the heart of London's life ; it has oozed from many veins but, until the latter years, it has been driven under by the competitive forces of leisured interest and privileged power. Now the soul of Co-operation is rising above all material opposition and awakening the dull influence of apathy. The glow of the associative idea is pulsating the great Metropolis. A Co-operative Consciousness is brightening the horizon and its citizens are entering into a fuller life—through the simple, plain portals of their own shops. By organising the distribution of the daily needs Londoners will ultimately control the great Emporia of Commerce, Industry, Recreation, and Civic Rule. In one of his dramas, A. W. Pinero described the Future as being only the Past entered by another gateway. That is true of the Co-operative Conquest of London. There has been a century of struggle ; but we glory in the tribulation "knowing that tribulation worketh patience ; and patience, experience ; and experience, hope." The London Co-operative Society, with its 250,000 members, owning £2,500,000 of capital, and doing an annual trade of six and a quarter million pounds sterling in hundreds of shops and departments, owned by the members, has emerged from the tribulations, patience, experience, and hopes of the humble men and women who have worked to shape their own means of living and to control their course upon the earth. The beginnings of London co-operation are as old as the London stone that reminds those who gaze upon it from the Church wall in Cannon Street of the ancient lineage of their city. For Co-operation is, as Ruskin declared, "the law of life," and must prevail when the

clash of arms, the domination of physical force, and the subtleties of commercial interests give way to reason and selflessness in fashioning the destinies of mankind.

There is growing, in London, a Co-operative Consciousness based on the achievements of the last few years. A century ago a London Co-operative Society centred in the City strove to expand itself to the outer fringe. It did not succeed. But the Idea was not vanquished. It was re-embodied in scores of Metropolitan boroughs and in a few hundred societies. They, too, have disappeared from the commercial surface to rise again in a new London Co-operative Society that is strengthening with the years and, starting from the Suburbs, is reaching inwards into the heart of the Metropolis. It is drawing the citizens in a co-operative movement that will ultimately envisage itself in a great Central Headquarters in the City as well as in the business thoroughfares of the environs. For men and women who, ordinarily have little in common, are recognising that the co-operative society is more than a purveyor of the daily necessities. It is concerned with the quickening of the co-operative spirit in distribution, in production, in neighbourliness, and in the leisure, as well as the working hours of the people. Hence the almost startling suddenness with which the L.C.S. has lately invaded London. It has been no rush of new blood. The manifestation of the present progress is the fulfilment of the hopes and aspirations of three or four generations, and of the new unity that has lately come into the minds of all who work for their living—whether with hand or brain. We believe, with Mazzini, that—

Two things are essential to the realisation of the progress we seek: the declaration of a principle and its incarnation in action.

Let us see how the principle of co-operation was evolved by our predecessors in London; then we will demonstrate its incarnation in action by contemporaries.

## CHAPTER II.

# THE BEGINNING OF CO-OPERATION.

THE year 1821 was a milestone year in the London co-operative pilgrimage. On January 21st a meeting of journeymen printers formed the Co-operative and Economical Society. Their aspirations were high and wide, for they sought nothing less than to—

establish a village of unity and mutual co-operation combining agriculture, manufacture, and trade.

George Mudie was the convener of these Community-makers, and six days later he published No. 1 of the *Economist* from 158, Strand. This was described as—

a periodical paper explanatory of the new system of society projected by Robert Owen, Esq., and a plan of association for improving the condition of the working classes, during a continuance of their present employment.

The Co-operative and Economical Society elaborated a scheme for a communal centre for 250 families. The men were to pay (so the estimated cost ran out on paper) 21s. a week for the feeding, clothing, and education of their families. There was to be a common hall for the meals; provision was contemplated for sickness and old age. Towards the end of the year some houses were taken in Guildford Street East, Spa Fields, for home colonisation, but the venture did not go very far, or very long, and was soon in the obscurity of lost communities. The *Economist* ceased publication the following year. It is chiefly remembered for the famous declaration upon which is based the assumption that Robert Owen was the father of the modern co-operative movement.

"THE SECRET IS OUT; it is unrestrained CO-OPERATION, on the part of ALL the members, for EVERY PURPOSE of social life."



The only article signed by Owen appeared in No. 32. Therein he laid down the proposition—

That the wants of the world have been long supplied through the commerce founded upon profits upon cost price, a minute division of labour, and the competition of individual interests.

As a consequence of such a manipulation of the daily necessities of the people—

The acquisition of wealth and not of happiness is the chief aim of Society.

• This was the comprehensive outlook of Owen. By correcting the environment in which folks lived he would lift them out of the carking toil of their normal condition. They would dance into pleasurable well-being. Yes, I use the word "dance" advisedly, for in all his Communities—both in America and in Great Britain—dancing appeared on the daily time table, and recreation entered much into his scheme of life, for others.

#### GROPING TOWARDS THE LIGHT.

Following the fading of the Economical Society and its organ came a shoal of phantasmal proposals for rebuilding industry in "England's fair and pleasant land." William Blake, the artist, poet, and prophet, was acquainted with some of the people who were stretching forward for their fellows, and many of those who felt deeply for the workers in the pre-Victorian years had caught the spirit of his "Jerusalem," and did "not cease from mental strife" when he was buried in a common grave in Bunhill Fields in 1827. Out of the vast mass of thought that found vent in the pamphlets and the press, and was given out from the platforms in the coffee-house discussion forums, came the idea of mutual co-operation in all the needs of daily existence. In the *Black Dwarf*, a kind of revolutionary publication published by Thomas Wooler from an office in Sun Street, Finsbury, in 1824, definite mention was made of co-operation as a solvent for the wrongs of mankind. By the process of the traditional

acceptance of statements constantly repeated, Robert Owen is generally acclaimed as the founder of the modern British storekeeping movement. As a matter of historic fact the co-operative form of shopkeeping began while Robert Owen was away in America advocating communal colonies and endeavouring to found a New Moral World. Owen's views were more expansive than those of the men who started the London Co-operative Society a hundred years ago. They were far wider in vision than those of the "owd weyvurs" of Rochdale who, in 1844, set up their little store and divided the economies they secured by mutual trading in proportion to the purchases of the members. That was the distinctive contribution of the Rochdale Pioneers to Social Science. They adapted a new principle of business equity by giving the consumer a share of the profits which bore a definite monetary ratio to his expenditure. To those simple folks the notion seemed quite natural; in carrying it into practice they did not realise they were opening the avenue to economic justice. But those Rochdale Pioneers were the harbingers of a new Social Order. The individual dividend proved the lure of the modern co-operative movement. The foundations had been laid in London nearly twenty years before. Out of all the agitation that had been developed in the Metropolis in the latter years of the XVIIIth century and the first quarter of the XIXth had evolved an idea of association in trade. The profits had been divided on a basis of membership or of capital holding—in imitation of the way of the contemporary trading world. The Rochdale application of the division according to purchases made all the difference to the vitality of the movement. It is the distinction that should always be borne in mind in considering the commercial and co-operative structure of modern Society. It is a distinction that London may share, in the shadow of Rochdale.



ROBERT OWEN,  
who gave inspiration to the  
co-operative ideal from 1800  
onwards



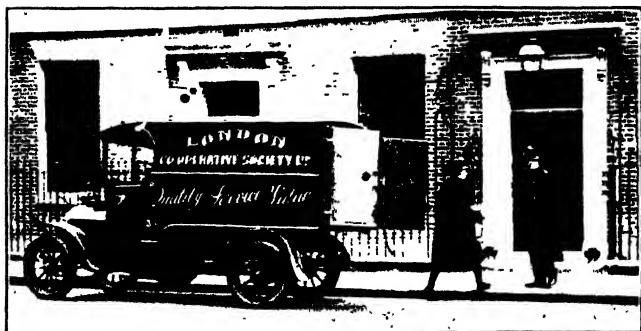
WILLIAM LOVETT,  
storekeeper, London  
Co-operative Society,  
1824-1834



GEORGE BRIMER,  
1st Secretary, Stafford  
Co-operative Society, 1861



TOM HUGHES,  
President of the first Co-  
operative Congress held in  
London, 1869



The L.C.S. Van Delivering Goods at the Premier's Residence, 10,  
Downing Street, during the period of the first Labour Government, 1924.



OWEN'S ATTITUDE TO SHOPKEEPING.

Owen sought to establish a Utopia, and seemed on the point of failure; the shopkeeping co-operators tried simply to supply their daily needs, and nearly succeeded. The plan of trying to improve the existing order of things by merely distributing commodities across the counter did not strongly appeal to the man who had introduced beneficent industrialism at New Lanark. When he returned from America in 1827, he "looked somewhat coolly on these 'trading associations,'" and very candidly declared—according to William Lovett's Autobiography—

that their mere buying and selling formed no part of his grand co-operative scheme, but when he found that great numbers among them were disposed to entertain many of his views, he regarded them with more favour, and ultimately took an active part among them.

Such a recollection by Lovett somewhat obscures Owen's concern with our modern movement, and J. M. Ludlow, who, with E. V. Neale, drafted the Industrial and Provident Societies Act of 1852, and was subsequently the Registrar of such societies, came to the conclusion that Owen "never took any practical part in promoting co-operation, and it certainly succeeded without his help." This view is confirmed by the researches of Professor Graham Wallas into the MSS. of Francis Place at the British Museum. When the Labour Exchanges in London collapsed, and his Grand National Consolidated Trade Union failed to function, Owen went to many places advocating his New Moral World. Visiting Carlisle in 1836 he wrote:—

To my surprise I found there six or seven co-operative societies in different parts of the town, doing well, as they think—that is, making some profit by joint-stock trading. It is, however, high time to put an end to the notion very prevalent in the public mind that this is the social system which we contemplate or that it will form any part of the arrangement in the New Moral World.

Owen, seeking a colony of Harmony in which environment should mould character, had overlooked

the moral, educational, and economic lessons to be learned from the simple expedient of shopkeeping. True, he became a customer of one of the self-governing co-operative printing works set up during the Christian Socialist activities from 1848 to 1852; but he left the co-operative societies to secure their legal status with the help of men who regarded the organisation of consumers and producers as a stepping stone to the higher things he visioned. He did not assist the structure; with the foundation, however, he had much to do. Hence the association of his name with a movement that honours him more as an inspirational force than as an administrative and guiding officer. Without the larger ideas he gave forth the smaller ones that took root might not have found a congenial soil.

Now, in its evolution during the last decade, the London Co-operative Society is visualising something of Owen's New View of Society. Owen had little concern for the individual interest; he was out for the "unrestrained co-operation" that embraces life in all its phases. So, too, the newer London Co-operative Society restrains the individual dividend so that there may be a larger collective surplus with which to spread comfort over all its members, and enable them to reach the Highest through mutual selflessness.

Much of the Co-operation that flowed out of the complacency of the Victorian years into the Edwardian era counted its millions, and enriched its dividends by narrowing itself to mere shopkeeping. To see how closely the London Co-operative Society is approximating its policy to that of the London co-operators a hundred years ago I continue the narrative in the chronological sequence that was slightly diverted in order to make clear the attitude of Owen to the movement that arose out of the ideas he propounded, and which developed in another path than that he cleared. Were he alive to-day I fancy that in sympathy with the widening courage of London co-operators, he would

join the membership. We might even find that, like Ben Adhem,

His name led all the rest.

In 1824 the London Co-operative Society was formed, mainly for the advocacy of the new Social Science. It found rooms for its debates—that being the customary method of propaganda in those days—in Burton Street, W.C. So much interest was evoked that, early in 1825, it met in the Crown and Rolls rooms in Chancery Lane. Then in November the Society removed to 36, Red Lion Square,\* where for nearly ten years it proved an energising force for the trading societies that were set up in central London. It was a great season for the pioneer efforts of zealous men—in those days the women were less active in the co-operative movement than is now the case—who saw a new doorway to the Castle of Content. J. Corss, as the secretary, was the custodian of the keys.

#### LONDON ANTICIPATING ROCHDALE.

Arising out of the work of the London Co-operative Society came, in 1826, a Co-operative Community Fund Association—proving the hold that the Owenite ideas had obtained in the minds of the men. A *Co-operative Magazine* appeared. This had the usual fate of the many Opinion-making journals. Those for whose benefit it was intended were loath to pay their pence; and it succumbed.

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\*Red Lion Square has intimate co-operative associations. The first London Co-operative Society (1824-1834) was at 36; at No. 31 the Co-operative Needlewomen's Association, with which Octavia Hill was connected, had its workrooms; the Working Men's College had a beginning in the same house before going to Great Ormond Street; at No. 8 was the firm which William Morris founded to give beauty to industrial art; at No. 17 Morris and Burne-Jones lived awhile—in the house where Rossetti had previously lived. For the last quarter of a century the co-operative associations of Red Lion Square have been preserved by the Co-operative Permanent Building Society. At No. 19 the Co-operative Frame Makers and Gilders had their workshops.

In January, 1827, appeared No. 1 of the new series of the *Co-operative Magazine and Monthly Herald*. The first series, in 1926, was a miscellany of Owenism and general knowledge. In its initial No. the editor declared :—

Mr. Owen does not propose that the rich should give up their property to the poor ; but that the poor should be placed in such a situation as could enable them to create *new wealth* for themselves.

The issue for 1927 marked a definite approach.

With that Magazine the Century of Co-operation really begins. For its pages outlined co-operative trading schemes to reach the aspirations of Bellers, More, Harrington, Thompson, Robert Owen, and the Utopians. Napoleon had called us "a nation of shopkeepers." The co-operators of 1827 found in shopkeeping the creation of new resources and the accumulation of power. The *Co-operative Magazine* was published at 4, York Street, and was sold at the office of the London Co-operative Society. The introduction declared that it would give a—

view of the true social, or co-operative and communal system.

The object was to secure "the greatest possible happiness of all its members"—an enlargement of the utilitarian philosophy of the Jeremy Bentham school, which limited its happiness to "the greatest number." The introductory article covered 20 of the 48 pages, and was followed by a letter from C. F. C., of Pentonville, who deplored the "mere theoretical teaching" and "the recondite doctrines of philosophical necessity" that had been disseminated, and urged the working classes "to resolve that we shall do for ourselves." The Editor replied suggesting that the London Co-operative Society and the Co-operative Community Fund Association would assist in the promotion of a practical plan where—

You will have public stores, in which you will deposit all the agricultural, manufacturing, mechanical and other produce ;



and you will get out of them as much as you want when you require it. The storekeepers, whom you will choose from yourselves, and change as often as you think proper, must have their accounts prepared for your inspection as often as you wish. You will appoint public meetings once a week, or as often as you judge proper, to examine and discuss publicly the state of your affairs, or any other subject you please.

There we have the germ of the modern co-operative system. That is the fundamental principle of the store that was opened at Rochdale seventeen years later. Right through the whole of the *Co-operative Magazine* of 1827 runs the cry of the Greek "Eureka." Those early co-operators had found what Mazzini called "the word of the Epoch—Association." In 1844, the idea wended along to Lancashire and became revitalised by the individualistic distribution of dividends. We Londoners may claim some share in the discovery of Co-operation; in asserting our place in the Brotherhood of Business we are not detracting from the brightness of the Rochdalian sky; in fact we were in at the dawn.

Mr. Sidney Webb, at the 37th opening session of the Working Men's College, in October, 1890, recalled that the co-operative movement had succeeded in Lancashire "while in London it had failed, but nearly all the ideas and enthusiasm had been exported from London to Lancashire, and there been utilised." In the present century, however, "there has been little to complain of in the growth of co-operation in the metropolitan area" is the opinion given by Mr. Sidney Webb and his wife in their latest book on the Co-operative Movement.

#### THE DREAM OF A CENTURY AGO.

By the spring of 1827 an Auxiliary Fund was forming, to be composed of the profits of a trading enterprise carried on by members of the Association.

The idea was gaining financial support and—anticipating the programme of the London Co-operative Society of 1927—one of the most active advocates, C. F. C., writing from the L. C. S. of Red Lion Square, declared—

I HOPE ONE DAY TO SEE THE ASSOCIATION IN  
POSSESSION OF AT LEAST ONE REPOSITORY IN  
EACH OF THE LEADING THOROUGHFARES IN

LONDON. I ANTICIPATE THE TIME WHEN THAT BODY WILL ARREST THE TIDE OF RICHES IN ITS PROGRESS, AND DIVERT IT INTO A NEW AND PUBLICLY BENEFICIAL CHANNEL, INSTEAD OF SUFFERING ALL THE GAINS OF COMMERCE TO FLOW INTO THE POCKETS OF PARTICULAR INDIVIDUALS, FOR THEIR EXCLUSIVE ENJOYMENT; WHEN IT WILL TAKE UP A FEW OF THOSE GAINS IN THEIR PROGRESS, FROM TIME TO TIME, AND BY THEIR MEANS EMANCIPATE THE MILLION FROM THE CONTROL OF THE UNITS.

When, reading through piles of the early propaganda literature which ultimately moved the multitudes out of their apathy into action, I came upon this statement, it seemed so akin to the purpose of the present London Society that it deserves the distinctive lettering in which it appears above. Need one write more to prove the vitality of the co-operative principle? The Co-operative Community Fund founders of 1827 may have seemed "the idle singers of an empty day"; but the dream is materialising and we shall soon have "one repository in each of the leading thoroughfares of London," and through co-operation we shall "emancipate the millions." Already one million of the people have thrown off "the control of the units" and raised a capital of nearly three million pounds. This is now being increased at the rate of £20,000 per week.

Frequent references were made in the *Co-operative Magazine* to projected co-operative communities to be established within 50 miles of the city of London. Faith was fuller than Finance. By the autumn only £100 had been subscribed by between 30 and 40 people. Then in September, 1827, the Union Exchange Society was established. Mr. Manning and Mr. W. King were its leading lights, and the immediate object was defined as

The immediate object of this Society is to generalize and equalize, as far as present circumstances will admit, the present condition and future prospects of its members. This the members intend to bring about by meeting once a week, or oftener, as circumstances may render expedient, for the

purpose of supplying each other with such articles as their various occupations will enable them to produce, subject to a *general percentage*, which it is intended for the present to divide periodically;\* thus giving the members *one common feeling and interest* to the extent of such percentage on all their transactions as a Society, but at the same time retaining a sufficient share of *individual responsibility* to secure the Society from the possibility of loss.

It will be obvious to any reflecting mind that to a Society sufficiently numerous, and having occupations sufficiently various, there can be no object which they direct their attention to, whether it be the occupation of land, the erection of dwellings, the establishment of schools, and asylums for the youth and aged, &c., which they cannot by perseverance and assiduity obtain; thus gradually superseding the present conflicting scenes that surround them, and substituting in their stead a full and complete system of Co-operative Community.

THE UNION EXCHANGE SOCIETY has on sale several articles; as TEA, BREAD, FLOUR, CLOTHES, BOOTS and SHOES, UMBRELLAS, CARVED and GILT ARTICLES, BRASS AND TIN WARE, &c., &c., and they make and repair in those articles according to order. Their Meetings are on Tuesday evenings at 8 o'clock, at 36, Red Lion Square.

#### INTERESTING THE BUYER AND SELLER.

Again we see a resemblance, in this primal co-operative venture, to the modern co-operative movement. The Rochdale Pioneers, living in a small textile town, where the men met each other daily in the mills, and so formed a compact body, were able, by their thrift, steadfastness, and natural independence, to co-operate successfully. Their Story, popularised by Holyoake, fired the imagination of the North. The environment was congenial; and the discovery of the dividend on purchases drew consumers to the stores. But "there is nothing new under the sun," and the historian of London Co-operation recalls this aim of the Union Exchange Society of 1827 as indicating something of the idea that has given fame to Rochdale. It

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\*This does not prevent the individual from investing his share in any fund that is or may be accumulating for Co-operative purposes, while it at the same time shows an immediate Co-operation.

was intended that in the exchange of goods the general percentage, *i.e.*, surplus or profit, should be divided "periodically, thus giving the members *one common feeling and interest* (these words are italicised in the original print) . . . but at the same time retaining a sufficient share of *individual responsibility*." And the editorial footnote clearly indicates that the dividend was an individual possession showing "an immediate co-operation." If the member did not wish to withdraw his share of the dividend, he could allow it to remain in any fund "accumulating for co-operative purposes." That is precisely the condition that obtains in the London Co-operative Society of to-day. Charles Howarth, of Rochdale, and A. Campbell, of Glasgow, have shared the honour of prescribing dividend on the sale of goods; may we not add the name of W. King, of London, as one of the trinity of social doctors who gave Co-operation a distinctive place in the commercial life of the country?

The Union Exchange Society began trading in September, when the returns for the month reached £7. In October there was an accession of adherents, and business began in butter and other provisions. The monthly examination of affairs was a safeguarding feature. On the first meeting each month the list of members was read out and each one was called upon for 10 per cent upon whatever he had sold through the society in the previous month. From this sum payment for the meeting place (which, owing to the kindness of one of the number, never exceeded 2s. 6d.) was deducted. The remainder was divided equally among all, "thus creating one common interest between buyer and seller." The accounts were cleared up every month, and a fresh start made.

#### THE LONDON CO-OPERATIVE SOCIETY, 1824-1834.

Of all those early co-operative ventures, the London Co-operative Society was the most remarkable. Its establishment in 1824 has been mentioned. It con-

tinued until 1834—an originating and encouraging source of vitality to scores of trading societies which developed under its ægis. It held meetings on Thursday evenings at half-past eight. Its Sunday morning breakfasts were a particular phase of its advocacy. These attracted Society—with a big “S”—and the company was more varied than the menu. Here is a contemporary newspaper report of a gathering in 1827:

On Sunday, September the 9th, a very numerous and highly-respectable meeting of members of this Society and their friends met to breakfast at their Rooms, 36, Red Lion Square. There were present several elegant and distinguished females, amongst whom we noticed Lady Elizabeth Dawson, Miss Rolland, &c., &c. After breakfast Mr. Owen, who had lately returned from America, gave the meeting a very interesting account of his proceedings in America.

Doubtless some of the “elegant and distinguished” persons went, like the Ephesians of old, to hear a “new thing”; others believed in co-operation as likely to lessen the harshness of the encroaching Industrial Revolution. Lady Byron, the wife of the poet, gave financial help to the L.C.S. She sold her carriage for £100 and handed the money to a body of unemployed Spitalfields weavers who were organising on co-operative lines. But the throng of wealthy and doctrinaire well-wishers evoked criticism from those who were out of touch with Comfort. One member observed that—

The time of the society is too frequently engrossed by discussing such questions as belong to any debating society, instead of the society exerting itself to procure and lay before the public meetings such discussions and explanations of various processes in the Arts of Life more particularly applicable to co-operative arrangements.

From the debates, however, the movement went on to a practical plane. The society instituted trading committees, with the intention of spreading such business throughout London.

Educational work of a systematic character was organised by the London Co-operative Society which, in the early part of 1825, arranged a series of weekly

public discussions in Chancery Lane. J. A. Roebuck and J. S. Mill attended and took part in the debates.\* One, on Owenism, lasted three months, resolving itself into a *lutte corps à corps* between the Owenites, led by the William Thompson whose writings had helped Owen, and the political economists.

#### THE FIRST LONDON CO-OPERATIVE STOREKEEPER.

Its best known member was William Lovett. He was identified with the Co-operative and Chartist movements. Born in 1800 at Newlyn, near Penzance, he came to London in 1821; found work as a cabinet maker, married, joined the first London Co-operative Trading Association, and opened a pastrycook and confectionery business in May's Buildings, St. Martin's Lane, in 1826. His resources were exhausted in a few months. Then he returned to his trade until James Watson, the storekeeper of the First London Co-operative Trading Association, then in Jerusalem Passage, Clerkenwell, resigned, and Wm. Lovett was induced to take his place. His acceptance of the post was influenced by its congenial outlook. In his own account of his "Life and Struggles" he thus refers to his association with Co-operation—

In taking this step I made some little sacrifice, as the salary they offered me was less than I could earn at my trade.

But, like many others, I was sanguine that those associations formed the first step towards the social independence of the labouring classes, and I was disposed to exert all my energies to aid in the work. I was induced to believe that the gradual accumulation of capital by these means would enable the working classes to form themselves into joint-stock associations of labour by which (with industry, skill, and knowledge) they might ultimately have the trade and manufactures of the country in their own hands.

Such a reflection from one who joined with his fellow co-operators a hundred years ago is almost similar to the declarations of collective ownership now made from the Pioneer propaganda van of the L.C.S.

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\*Autobiography John Stuart Mill. Chapter IV.

Lovett was one of the multitudes who have wished to aid the welfare of their fellows rather than raise an altar to Self. He joined with them in mutual efforts for improving their condition.

But I failed to perceive [he added] that the great majority of them lacked the self-sacrifices and economy necessary for procuring capital, the discrimination to place the right men in the right position for managing, the plodding industry, skill, and knowledge necessary for successful management, the moral disposition to labour earnestly for the general good, and the brotherly fellowship and confidence in one another for making their association effective.

This lack of trust was the bane of these social explorers. Twenty years later Kingsley observed that it would take a generation of discipline to enable co-operation to get a proper direction. Happily, men and women have gained the virtue of comradeship for the sake of comrades.

Things did not go too well with the business of the association. Then, as now, the lesson of loyalty had to be learned by co-operators. The passing of resolutions at public meetings is not enough; their effectiveness then, as now, was limited by members passing their own shops. The effects were soon felt by Lovett when his salary was reduced and, a few weeks later, his wife was requested to take his place at the store at half the salary at which he had been engaged.

#### SPREADING THE GOOD NEWS.

During his term of storekeeping he had an adventure which did something to turn his mind to the political problems of his time and to bring him into friendship with Henry Hetherington, whose subsequent weekly issue of *The Poor Man's Guardian*, from December, 1830, to the end of 1835, began and continued the struggle for an untaxed press; James Watson, a member of the London Co-operative Society, who took charge of Richard Carlisle's bookshop in Fleet Street when the Government were prosecuting the owner for selling works of which they did not approve; and

James Cleave, at whose Coffee House in Smithfield and, later, in Shoe Lane, the committee conducting the "Unstamped Agitation" for removing what Leigh Hunt first called "a tax on knowledge" met. These names are mentioned to indicate the active minds of the early co-operators. All three suffered imprisonment in their fight for the free press. It must have been as difficult for those members of the London Co-operative Society to avoid expressing themselves on the restrictions imposed by the State on the improvement of the working classes as it is for the adherents of the L.C.S. to ignore the freedom that the Government gives to the great capitalists to combine and to operate in the interests of the few. Especially when, at the same time, the statutory limitation of the shareholding of co-operative societies are kept down to £200 per member and any joint stock concern can use the word "co-operation" in its title without justifying it in its operations.

Resuming the story of the London Co-operative Society, which was the first formed in the Metropolis, it is clearly established that inquiries for information as to its aims, rules, and methods of working came from all parts of the country. The novelty of its idea of shops owned by the customers interested the workers in the textile towns of the North. Lancashire and Yorkshire Radicals and Reformers who, after Peterloo and similar events, almost despaired of political action, saw in the new principle of Co-operation, embodied in the London Society, a glimpse of practical proposals for relieving the stress of the Industrial Revolution. Applications for information came from all parts of the country to 36, Red Lion Square. Replying to such requests entailed so much labour that, just as the Society had formed the First London Co-operative Trading Association it launched the Society for Promoting Co-operative Knowledge, which later became the British Association for Promoting Co-operative Knowledge—a titular imitation of the British Association for the Advancement of Science, which was established



early in 1831. Several co-operative manufacturing societies had been formed and individual craftsmen wanted to effect a co-operative exchange with one another. So the Association took a house at 19, Greville Street, Hatton Garden, the first floor of which was fitted up as a Co-operative Bazaar. The First London Association removed from Clerkenwell to the ground floor of this house, and when the first secretary, Mr. George Skene, of the British Association for Promoting Co-operative Knowledge, resigned, William Lovett, who was the storekeeper on the ground floor, became the hon. secretary of the Association on that above.

#### THE UNTAXED PRESS AGITATION.

Among the visitors to 19, Greville Street, was an inquiring old fellow who wanted a knowledge of co-operative trading associations. Lovett gave him copies of the quarterly reports, and sold him some pamphlets on co-operation, from which to study the work. A few days later the storekeeper was served with an exchequer writ from Somerset House for selling a pamphlet on which "the duty had not been paid." One of the quarterly reports of the Association was on a sheet and a quarter of paper; on the latter the law required the payment of a pamphlet duty of one shilling. Lovett, with Hetherington, went to Somerset House. With one of the officials they discussed the problem, raising the plea that it was published for the British Association, which was a distinct body from the First London Co-operative Trading Association, to whose trustees the writ had been sent. Explanations of the difference were demanded, and—I quote from Lovett's Autobiography—

Mr. Hetherington began to reckon up the miscellaneous articles we dealt in, rather humorously contrasting bacon with snuff, butter with books, mustard with raisins, &c., which could not but excite the risible faculties of his questioner. .

Some correspondence ensued, and Somerset House eventually dropped the matter. The inquiring visitor

was discovered by the co-operators to be one of the common informers of the Court of Exchequer. The incident is interesting in giving Hetherington the incentive to embark on his campaign for unstamped newspapers and pamphlets. This was continued by the Metropolitan co-operators till the struggle was won by G. J. Holyoake's accumulated debts of £600,000 to the Treasury being annulled by the removal of the taxes on papers by Gladstone in 1855. Co-operators have given more than Dividends on Purchases to the people; they have helped the world to its enlightenment (as well as, I fear, its occasional embarrassment) by a free and unlicensed Press.

#### A BRIGHTON WITNESS.

There were early co-operative societies at Sheerness, Lennoxton, and Meltham Mills; but the many varied efforts at co-operation in London give a precedence in co-operative history to the Metropolis that none of the other isolated efforts would challenge. The Sheerness Society, starting in 1816, continues to the present day. In its early years it supplied its members with water from its own well, and continued business in that way until, in 1864, the larger community instituted a public water supply. But for 48 years the co-operators of the Isle of Sheppey looked to the Sheerness Society for pure water provided at a reasonable rate. It was the only illustration we have of a co-operative society anticipating the needs of the community in that respect.

Dr. William King, whose *Brighton Co-operator* of 1828-30 is being regarded as one of the first clear statements of the co-operative principle, must have heard of the doings of the Co-operative and Economical Society when he was a medical student in London. In one of the earliest issues of his little paper\* he referred

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\* The *Brighton Co-operator*, with a biography of Doctor William King, by T. W. Mercer, has been reprinted by the Co-operative Union.

to the London Co-operative Society, and in 1829 mentioned societies of a similar type at Bethnal Green, Stepney, Whitechapel, and Marylebone. The *Brighton Co-operator*, after April, 1830, to its conclusion, was published at the Co-operative Bazaar, Hatton Garden. G. J. Holyoake, in his History of Co-operation, referred to a society at Stratford in 1829; but whenever he was asked as to the source of his information he always relied on his memory of conversations. Local researches, when I wrote the History of the Stratford Society, for the Congress of 1904, did not throw any further light on its existence, which must be regarded as legendary.

Reverting to William Lovett and his knowledge of many societies in existence in his day, his simple account of their practice and a statement of the use of profits for a beneficent collective purpose is interesting—

The members of those societies subscribed a small weekly sum for the raising of a common fund, with which they opened a general store, containing such articles of food, clothing, books, &c., as were most in request among working men, the profits of which were added to the common stock. As their funds increased, some of them employed their members, such as shoemakers, tailors and other domestic trades, paying them journeymen's wages, and adding the profits to their funds.

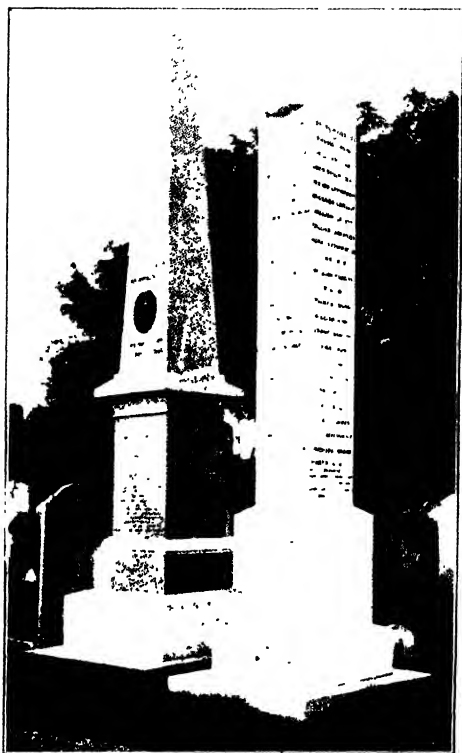
Thus we see the altruistic purpose to which the profits were originally applied. In the L.C.S. of to-day something of the same helpful service is rendered by the provision of Sick Appliances for the use of members, association with convalescent funds and homes, a Members' Emergency Fund for the relief of those in distress, grants to hospitals and charitable institutions, and the Death Benefits Scheme, under which grants totalling many thousands of pounds have been made by the Society to the relatives of deceased members.

### CHAPTER III.

## MORNING STARS OF LONDON CO-OPERATION.

BETWEEN 1830-33 mention is made in various co-operative publications of 44 societies then in existence in London. Many of these were in the West End which, a hundred years ago, was largely the habitat of the journeymen. There were at least seven stores in Bethnal Green, distinguished as First Bethnal Green, Second Bethnal Green—and so on. Islington had its society, and the Islington Methodists had a co-operative store in the High Street. The United Christians of Shoreditch had their shop in Leonard Street, and there was a Methodists' Co-operative Society in Soho. There was another in that region, with Henry Hetherington as a committee-man.

Hampstead, Pimlico, Finsbury, Lambeth, Southwark, Pentonville, Somers Town, Westminster, Ratcliff, Kingsland, Bow, Whitechapel, Stepney, Bloomsbury, Kennington, Chelsea, Knightsbridge, and Kensington had co-operative societies; the Metropolitan Society had its stores at the Eagle Coffee House in Farringdon Street, the committee acting as the storekeepers and distributors; there was a Hand in Hand Co-operative Society in Hoxton; the Second West London in Lincoln's Inn Fields; the Middlesex in Wardour Street; and another in John Street, Tottenham Court Road. The most famous of all was the First London, at 19, Greville Street, Hatton Garden, with William Lovett as the storekeeper. Commencing the fourth volume in January, 1830, the *Co-operative Magazine* became—apparently owing to the publication of similar papers at Brighton and Birmingham—the *London*

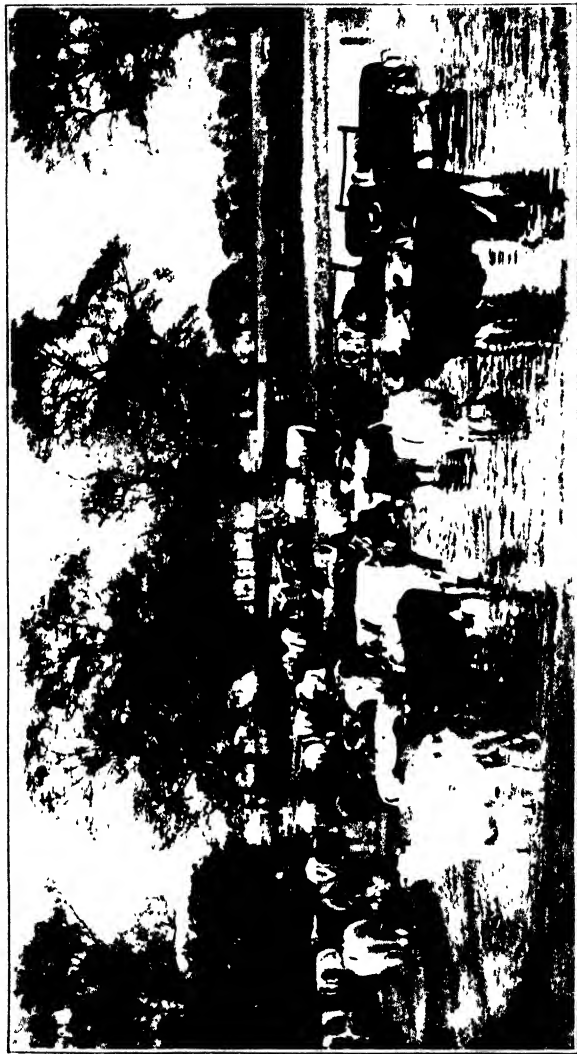


### THE OWEN OBELISK AND CO-OPERATORS' MEMORIAL. AT KENSAL GREEN.

In Kensal Green Cemetery is an Obelisk to Robert Owen, and a Memorial to men and women associated with the various Reform Movements in the Metropolis in the busy years of the last century.

Among the names recorded on that Monument whose identity with the development of the Co-operative Movement in London can be fully established, viz. John Bailey, Lady Noel Byron, Alice Campbell, Richard Child, W. Carpenter, C. D. Cole, Abram Combe, Robert Cooper, J. F. Crane, Allen Davenport, Henry Foxworth, W. Gidpin, Mary Hennell, Henry Hetherington, Julian Hibbert, G. J. Holyoake, William Howitt, Lloyd Jones, Charles Kingsley, William Lovett, F. D. Munn, J. M. Morgan, J. S. Mill, F. W. Neward, Robert Owen, William Port, H. S. Pratt, J. R. R. R. R., John Ruskin, W. Thompson, Henry Travers, Arnold Townley, Jane Watson, Thomas Wooler.

Three sides of the Memorial are already filled. Will the present generation supply the names to fill the fourth side as a record of those who with equally clear vision have looked beyond the individualism into the co-operative future?



L.C.S. COWS ON THE FARM AT ONGAR. ON THE WAY TO THE DAIRY.

The milk sales of the Society are over 100,000 gallons per week.

*Co-operative Magazine* and recorded that there were more than a hundred co-operative trading societies in England. It re-defined their objects as—

To furnish most of the articles of food and ordinary consumption to its members at less prices than each member would be obliged to give at retail shops, and to accumulate a fund for the purpose of renting land for cultivation, and the formation thereon of a co-operative community.

It recorded the quarterly meetings of the British Association for Promoting Co-operative Knowledge; at the second of these 172 societies throughout the country were reported. Three months later their number had grown to 266. The meeting was held at the Mechanics' Institute, which Dr. Birkbeck and others had founded in Southampton Buildings, Chancery Lane, in 1823, and was encouraged by the announcement that there were 508 members of the Association. The objects of the Association were not only to publish statistics and establish exchanges between co-operative societies but "to register the names and occupations as well as the talents of the co-operators." Signs of progress were observed in Pimlico, where a society with 82 members owning £140 worth of property was making a profit of £4 a week; the Metropolitan Co-operative Book Society had started under the chairmanship of Wm. Ellis—a friend of J. S. Mill—and a Co-operative Brush Manufacturing Society was selling its goods from 2 to 3 p.m. daily at the Co-operative Bazaar.

#### THE CAUSE OF EARLY FAILURES.

There were, however, troubles to meet, as when the *British Co-operator* had to act as a kind of Public Censor and write severely in this strain—

We regret that the neglect on the part of the first Bloomsbury Society to take legal measures to secure their property has deprived them of the power to recover their trading stock from four of the members of the Society, one of whom was nominally a trustee, which is as bad as having no trustee at all. We learn the parties entered the Store at night, and decamped with all the movables they could carry off. This has broken up the Society. The Co-operators under competi-

tive society must have recourse to the protection it affords, or they will always be exposed to designing boasters.

In one quarterly report of 1830 the British Association for Promoting Co-operative Knowledge the committee recorded—

With extreme regret that an ignorant, yet powerful band of petty shopkeepers at Hampstead has been successful, by bribes and low cunning, in frustrating the attempt of some co-operators in that place to hold a public meeting.

Ere long most of the co-operative associations succumbed and, with them, the British Association, which had done much to bring the societies into close touch with each other. The most prominent causes of their failure were detailed by an observer as—

- 1.—Religious differences.
- 2.—The want of legal security.
- 3.—The dislike which the women had to confine their dealings to one shop.

Between 1830 and 1833 hundreds of these co-operative trading associations were formed in various parts of the country. Within those three years there were, at least, 44 such societies in the Metropolitan area. They made the provision of pure and unadulterated food an essential feature of their stock-in-trade. To keep their members out of the clutches of the tradesmen who encouraged "tick," or credit, they advocated ready-money trading, with an insistence that made the idea appear fundamental. Such principles were too exacting for a world in which "casual employment, the non-protection of the consumer against short weight and impurity, and the "free competition" in which Capital always held the ace, were a trinity of circumstances too strong for the simple, sincere, and unsophisticated co-operators—who lacked knowledge of the chicanery of commerce, and obtained most of their information in the night schools, and Sunday school, which arose when philanthropists discovered that Ignorance was dangerous to the State. Many of the



secretaries of those early societies were unlettered and untutored men; the writing of minutes and keeping accounts were severe tasks indeed. For we must remember that, in 1836, 85 per cent of the population was wholly uninstructed in the rudiments of knowledge, and that, writing in 1844, Friedrich Engels declared that the industrial workers "could rarely read, and could far more rarely write." Despite such depressing circumstances Co-operation had struck deeply down into the heart of London. Like Browning's hero, it was

Battled—to fight better.

When the London Co-operative Society broke up in 1834 Lovett opened premises in Gray's Inn Road as a coffee house, supplying refreshments by day, and giving opportunity for discussion at night; for in those years the coffee houses were the resort of the ardent reformers and agitators. Then he drifted into the political agitation, and actually drafted the People's Charter, thus anticipating the present close association of co-operation in political matters. Holyoake spoke at his funeral in Highgate cemetery in 1875—the year when a Co-operative Congress in London proved the growing vitality of the storekeeping by the customers which he had helped more than 40 years before. For the movement was so vigorous in 1830 that William Pare suggested in the *Birmingham Co-operative Herald* that "wholesale purchases should be made for societies in and about London"—an idea that did not adequately materialise till 1874, when the Co-operative Wholesale Society established its London branch at 118, Minories.

#### CHAPTER IV.

### DRIFTING FROM OWENISM TO CHARTISM.

CO-OPERATION was so closely associated with the socio-political ferment of the first third of the nineteenth century that it must be considered as part of the democratic stream that flowed from the London Corresponding Society for a few years after its formation in 1792. This influenced public opinion in the provinces through the medium of letters exchanged by the individual members; hence the name. It had over 70 sections meeting in London, with an average weekly attendance of 2,000 people, who discussed their problems, much as do the Guilds of the L.C.S. of our own time. The Society drew together such advanced thinkers as Thomas Spence, the author of *Land Nationalisation*, and William Godwin, the founder of anarchist communism. The Combination Acts were passed in 1799 and 1800 to prevent workmen acting in unison, and the rush of the Industrial Revolution was giving greater power to the financial and credit firms of the Metropolis. Luddism was blazing in the North and Midlands; Peterloo accentuated the bitterness of the age, and Shelley's message of revolt "To the Men of England" stirred their imagination.

Thinkers were brooding over the condition of the country. Adam Smith had died before the London Corresponding Society was formed; but his *Wealth of Nations* remained. David Ricardo went in 1823,

and Jeremy Bentham, the Utilitarian philosopher, lived till 1832. William Thompson, who resided with him for some years, died a year later, leaving £10,000 for the founding of home colonies on the lines of his *Directions for the Establishment of Co-operative Communities*, which had greatly influenced the thought of Robert Owen. Some philanthropic patrons secured the passing of the first Savings' Bank Act, in 1817. It proved no solvent for the distress that followed the Napoleonic Wars, when starvation and unemployment were the twin brothers of the poor. Not till 1824 were the Combination Acts repealed, largely through the efforts of Francis Place outside, and Joseph Hume, M.P., inside, the House of Commons. A few years before, Bell and Lancaster had started their work of education. The library of Francis Place, behind his tailor's shop at Charing Cross, became the armoury of agitation in the pre-Victorian years.

Political events were trending towards the Reform Bill of 1831. The outlook of the working class was desperately dull when, into the chaos and clash of ideas, came Robert Owen's *New View of Society*, based on community in land and living. Owenism and Socialism\* became synonymous terms. Robert Owen came to London at the age of 10, lodged for a while with his brother at 81, High Holborn, and learned the drapery business, near London Bridge, at fifteen. Going to Manchester he accumulated enough to become a partner in mills at New Lanark, in which William Allen, a friend of Elizabeth Fry, was interested. There he developed his theories on industrial employment. Some of these he had assimilated from the proposals made by John Bellers, in a work on *Raising a College of Industry*, which was issued from White Hart Court, in Gracious Street, London, in 1696. Bellers showed how manufacturing operations could be wisely directed and the results of the labour equitably distributed.

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\*The word "Socialist" appeared in the *Co-operative Magazine* for 1827.

Owen reprinted the pamphlet and was impressed by its views. New Lanark had provided him with his one successful social experiment; London then became the centre of his propaganda.

The Owenite movement was interwoven with co-operation. But the committees were men of strong views and equally as persistent in their advocacy as was Owen. A cleavage arose between Owen and his followers. It may have been temperamental; it was certainly pronounced. The co-operators were democrats; Owen was not accustomed to the exchange of views around a committee table. He did not get along with his partners at New Lanark, and his attitude with regard to the rule of the majority in his schemes was that of the autocrat—benevolent, philanthropic, and kindly, but little inclined to mould his Grand Idea to mere collectivist control by other people. Certainly the London Co-operative Society attracted a more democratic order of mind than was enlisted under the ægis of Owen. Various associations were formed by him and his followers, among them being the Metropolitan Trades Union, the National Union of the Working Classes, and the Association of Intelligent and Well-disposed of the Industrious Classes for removing Ignorance and Poverty. Its objects were excellent; its name was intolerably long and must have hastened its demise.

William King, who has been mentioned on page 24 as having been one of the founders of the Union Exchange Society of 1827, developed his plan of Labour Exchanges, with the idea of Labour Notes in payment for productions. He established one in Portland Road, and another early in 1832 at the Gothic Hall, New Road. These started well, but so many useless articles were offered and deposited with the Exchanges that the Notes depreciated, and the failure was nearly complete when Robert Owen organised his Labour Exchange in the Gray's Inn Road, the idea being to take goods from the trading associations in various

parts of the country, run an infants' school, and found a community—a combination in which the mind of Owen is clearly evident.

On September 17th, 1832, the National Equitable Labour Exchange was opened in Gray's Inn Road. The building was a large one with a central courtyard, much like the old coaching inns. The plan was that the workman—to whom the coming of machinery was merely a rumour and "mass production" unthinkable—should take his work to the Exchange, receiving "Labour Notes" in payment. This was based at 6d. an hour, so that if the man had been occupied eight hours on the task he received an equivalent of 4s. in "Labour Notes" on paying 1d. in the shilling to the Exchange. The Notes were taken to another part of the Exchange, which was really a kind of departmental store, and exchanged for goods. In the seventeen weeks prior to Christmas, 1832, the deposits represented 445,501 hours, and the exchanges 376,166 hours. A dispute with the owners of the property, and the apathy of the world around led to the early failure of the venture. This did not deter Owen from his pilgrimage of ideas. He obtained possession of a hall\* in Burton Street near St. Pancras Church in 1832, which he used till 1837 for his lectures and the "social festivals" of the various organisations he formed. While in possession of that place of advocacy, he lived near by, at 4, Crescent Place.

The trading associations had held Co-operative Congresses at Manchester and Birmingham before 1832. In that year another was held in connection with the

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\*This was demolished in 1927, the site being wanted for a block of flats. It was erected in 1811 for the Particular Baptists. Following the Owenites it was used by the Swedenborgians; then it became a Jewish synagogue; next it was a chapel-at-ease of St. Pancras Church, and having passed to the Roman Catholics for a school was finally adapted as a Salvation Army citadel. Strange indeed is it that this whilom Socialist meeting hall should have served so many religions—for Owen was in conflict with all the religions of his day.

Gray's Inn Road Institution. There were 800 visitors. Robert Owen presided, and Joseph Hume, with other M.P.'s, represented Parliamentary interest in the proceedings. William Pare, of Birmingham, "the first co-operative missionary," was present, and the country was divided into nine areas for the efficient dissemination of the new Social Evangel. A set of "Regulations for Co-operative Societies" was adopted. The fundamental basis for these was as follows:—

Let it be universally understood that the grand ultimate object of all co-operative societies, whether engaged in trading, manufacturing, or agricultural pursuits, is community in land.

Delegates were present from nearly seventy societies, and although they talked for six consecutive days they "did very little business."

The last of this series of congresses was held at Halifax in 1835; in Owen's journal, the *Crisis*, this meeting was ignored. At that time he was inaugurating his Association of All Classes of All Nations, formed to effect an entire change in the character and condition of the human race; and in May of that year organised the first Socialist Congress. These were held annually, being mostly concerned with "community in land." Manchester Congress in 1841 lasted 17 days, and closely considered the Queenwood community then beginning. At that meeting G. J. Holyoake was appointed as one of Owen's Social Missionaries. The 1842 and 1845 Congresses took place at the John Street Institute; the intervening ones at Harmony Hall on the Queenwood settlement at Tytherly (Hampshire), which broke up in 1845.

The disillusionment of the Reform Act of 1832 by which the commercial and middle classes wrested power from the gentry and kept the working people disfranchised was complete. Trade Unions became the avenue of hope. Early co-operators, Lovett, Cleave, Watson, Hetherington, Julian Herbert, and many others, became identified with a succession of associations that sought

escape from the wilderness to the Promised Land. The National Union of the Working Classes got going with the declaration—

That Commonwealth is best ordered when the citizens are neither too rich nor too poor.

This declined in strength when its members joined the Consolidated Trades Union, which organised the procession of 120,000 people who walked in procession in April, 1834, from a meeting place where King's Cross station now stands, to the Home Office, to present a petition in favour of the Dorchester labourers who were being transported for their membership of a trade union. Robert Owen was in that procession, and co-operators and trade unionists accompanied him. While Thomas Hodgskin and others gave trade unionism its economic outlook, Owen's advocacy dwelt mainly on the character produced as a result of combination.

Then came the London Working Men's Association, formed at 14, Tavistock Street, Covent Garden, and later removed to 6, Upper North Place, Gray's Inn Road, a neighbourhood full of memories of the Owenite period, and now evidencing the revival of co-operation in a branch of the L.C.S. This Association deserves recall, because in November, 1836, it sent an address of fraternal friendship to the Working Men of Belgium—the first time that the organised workmen of this country sent a message of goodwill to those of other lands, a foreshadowing of the international friendship now obtaining in the trade union and co-operative movements.

The Association continued its work and convened the conference on Universal Suffrage at the British Coffee House in Cockspur Street, May 31st, 1837. When Queen Victoria came to the throne the Working Men's Association, of which Wm. Lovett was the secretary, addressed Her Majesty assuring the Queen—

that the country over which Your Majesty has been called to preside, has by the powers and industry of its inhabitants

been made to teem with abundance, and were all its resources *wisely developed* and *justly* distributed would impart ample means of happiness to all its inhabitants.

The Queen was told that the bulk of the nation were "toiling slaves," and that they wanted "an equality of political rights" to preserve the balance of society. Following the General Election of the same year came a renewal of the agitation for the franchise. The rise of the Chartists was a long and perilous adventure; their descent on April 10th, 1848, a more rapid process. But it opened the way for a revival of Co-operation and the legalising of societies.



## CHAPTER V.

# CHRISTIAN SOCIALISTS AND CO-OPERATIVE FOUNDATIONS.

THE People's Charter went to its Parliamentary doom in a hackney carriage on April 10th, 1848. The Chartists had had a Convention in the John Street Institute lent by the followers of Robert Owen. Lloyd Jones and William Lovett gave the delegates an account of the national workshops they had seen established in Paris. G. J. Holyoake and others were to mingle with the crowd to watch the repressive methods of the authorities who appointed special constables to protect London against its own people. The fiasco of April 10th need not be retold. But the commingling of co-operators and Chartists is suggestive of the economic as well as the political implications of the agitation.

The Chartist movement fell to pieces owing to the personal bickerings and lack of tolerance among the leaders. The Co-operative Movement recovered because of the new impetus given by the group of men associated with F. D. Maurice who became known as the Christian Socialists. J. M. Ludlow who, like Lloyd Jones and Lovett, had seen the self-governing workshops set up in Paris, was the most practical of the coterie; E. V. Neale, a barrister, who gave his life to the co-operative movement, sacrificed his family fortunes as well as his talents; Charles Kingsley secured a hearing with his *Alton Locke*; Tom Hughes championed the movement in Parliament and beyond; F. J. Furnival and a dozen others lent their aid without

mental or material stint. Following April 10th they issued *Politics for the People*, in which they proclaimed

Politics have been separated from household ties and affections—from art, and science, and literature. . . . When they become Politics for the People they are found to take in a very large field; whatever concerns man as a social being must be included in them.

During the winter of 1848–9 Maurice and his friends met some of the working classes in weekly conference, learning their point of view, and explaining their own. Kingsley, in *Cheap Clothes and Nasty*, assailed “our modern eleventh commandment—‘Buy cheap and sell dear’” as “damnable,” and urged that “the remedy must be in association, co-operation, self-sacrifice for the sake of one another.” They set up a dozen workingmen’s workshops in London. The most remarkable was that of the London Tailors’ Association at 34, Castle Street East\* (parallel with Oxford Street), one of the rules being that they were

mutually bound to devote one-third of their net profits to the extension of their numbers

That collapsed ten years later owing to the irregularities of the manager. The main cause of the failure of these associations was, according to Tom Hughes—

Having been started in reliance on large custom from trade societies and other organised bodies of working people, that custom was never forthcoming.

#### LEGISLATION FOR CO-OPERATIVE SOCIETIES.

Experiences in the formation of co-operative societies for production showed the Council of the Society for Promoting Working Men’s Association (the organisation set up by the Christian Socialists) the need for their legal protection. They urged Parliamentary friends to secure an inquiry into the investments of the middle and working classes. A Parliamentary Committee was appointed in April, 1852, all the witnesses being obtained by Ludlow and his legal friends. J. Stuart Mill

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\* The name is now changed to Eastcastle Street.

gave evidence, and made a great point of the disparity in the prices charged for articles in shops compared with the remuneration to the persons who actually made them. The result was the Industrial and Provident Societies Act of 1852. In July of that year a conference was held in the Tailors' Hall of Association when delegates from 28 co-operative societies attended to celebrate the passing of the Act. A resolution was suggested by the Bradford delegate, drafted by Kingsley and Hughes and carried unanimously,

That this conference entreats all co-operative establishments, for the sake of the general good, to sell all articles exactly for what they know them to be, and to abstain, as much as possible, from the sale of all articles publicly known to be adulterated, even if demanded by their customers.

That resolution, which has proved the basic principle of co-operative storekeeping, is carried out by the L.C.S. unto this day. Elsewhere\* the full story of the efforts to secure this legal recognition is told.

The Society for Promoting Working-Men's Associations changed its name, after the passing of the Act, into the Association for Promoting Industrial Societies—a more explicit reference to the particular form of organisation that it advocated. The first Festival of the newly-named Association was held in the Hall of Association, 34, Castle Street East, on February 13th, 1854. The Rev. F. D. Maurice was in the chair, those present including Viscount Goderich (afterwards the Marquis of Ripon, who rendered fine co-operative service with the Guild of Co-operators), the Rev. S. C. Hansard (rector of Bethnal Green), E. V. Neale, T. Hughes, Dr. F. J. Furnival, Walter Cooper (the brother of Thomas Cooper, the original of *Alton Locke*), J. M. Ludlow, Lloyd Jones, and the managers of many London co-operative associations. An executive committee was appointed by a General Conference, and this issued, in November, 1853, the *Co-operative*

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\* *Charles Kingsley and Parson Lot.* Manchester: Co-operative Union. London: T. Fisher Unwin, Ltd.

*Commercial Circular* which was published monthly till the Spring of 1855. This journal has no mention in the usual lists of old co-operative publications. It was brought to my notice by the late C. E. Maurice (the son of F. D. Maurice), who, on the completion of the volume on *Charles Kingsley and Parson Lot*, gave me a nearly-complete file of the numbers that were published, first by R. Shorter, the secretary of the Working Tailors' Association, and later by Dr. Furnival.

From this source we learn that "those co-operators in the country, who wish for London-made clothing, boots and shoes, &c., should apply to the Tailors' Association, Westminster Bridge Road, the Shoemakers, 11a, Tottenham Court Road, and the Needlewomen, Wellclose Square." "Circular meetings" were arranged monthly at the various co-operative associations. In Mile End there was a co-operative engineering works managed by John Musto, and financed by E. V. Neale. When the visitors from the other societies visited the society, "the co-operative talk came first," according to the report, "and then the pipes and beer which were ordered in are reported to have occupied the evening most successfully." These co-operative engineers had a beanfeast in June, 1854, at Woodford; whither they journeyed in two four-horse brakes and an omnibus.

#### THE CO-OPERATIVE CONGRESS.

The first of the modern series of Co-operative Congresses was held in the rooms of the Society of Arts, in the Adelphi, off the Strand, London, on May 31st, and June 1st, 2nd, and 3rd, 1869. In August of the preceding year a meeting of "gentlemen interested in co-operative undertakings," had been held on the premises of the Agricultural and Horticultural Association, 29, Parliament Street, Westminster, to convene a Congress of societies. E. Vansittart Neale presided, and an appeal for support was written by Lloyd Jones. This gave the names of more than a hundred mem-

bers of the committee, including the following trade unionists.\*

W. Allan (Engineers).  
R. Applegarth (Joiners).

D. Guile (Ironfounders).  
G. Odger (Trades Council).

Among others who supported the Congress were :

Louis Blanc.  
E. T. Craig.  
Passmore Edwards.

A. Greenwood.  
E. O. Greening.  
Rev. S. C. Hansard (Bethnal  
Green).

G. J. Holyoake.  
Hon. Auberon Herbert.

Charles Kingsley.

J. M. Ludlow.

J. S. Mill.

William Pare.

Hodgson Pratt.

John Ruskin.

Rev. Henry Solly.

Mrs. Lynn Lynton.

Several M.P.'s.

In connection with the Congress an exhibition of co-operative productions was held in a hall at 337, Strand, above the offices of the National Temperance League, with which many of the co-operators were associated. Tom Hughes, M.P., presided over 63 delegates from societies and trade unions interested in a close association with the co-operative movement. Three came from Scotland; about thirty from Metropolitan organisations; the remainder were from provincial societies, the North of England Co-operative Wholesale Society being represented by Abraham Greenwood. The London societies which had delegates afford evidence of the part played by Metropolitan co-operators in the inauguration of the Co-operative Congress. Of the 15 societies only that of Stratford (now in the L.C.S.) has remained. The mere list of the societies is a serviceable indication of the variety of forms in which the associative idea was being applied at that time.

#### DISTRIBUTIVE SOCIETIES.

*Bermondsey, Brixton, Deptford, St. John's Wood, East London, Pimlico and Westminster, Stratford.*

\*These four were leading members of the "Junta," the name of the group that got control of the amalgamated trade or craft unions that obtained ascendancy between 1850 and 1870.

## PRODUCTIVE SOCIETIES.

Perseverance Co-operative Boiler Makers (Deptford).  
 Co-operative Printers.  
 Co-operative Clothiers' Society.  
 Co-operative Cabinet Makers' Society.  
 Co-operative Colonisation Company.  
 Frame Makers' and Gilders' Association.  
 Co-operative Builders' Society.  
 Metropolitan and Home Counties' Purchasing Association.

The expenses of the Congress were £126, towards which Stratford gave £1—the highest contribution from any distributive society. Some of the speeches were decidedly optimistic. The delegate of the Metropolitan and Home Counties' Purchasing Association, which was a federation of 9 societies in the south and was dealing with another score, declared that—

London must ultimately be the best centre of the movement.

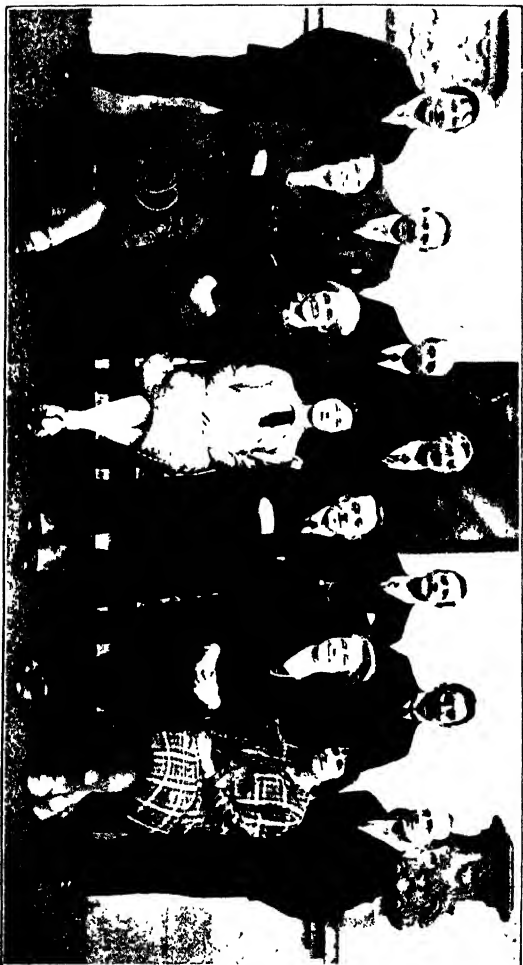
The discussion on the future organisation of the movement revealed the influence of those who lived in the Metropolis on the policy of societies. G. J. Holyoake advocated a London Co-operative Board, J. M. Ludlow a Central Board with geographical divisions for the whole of the country. William Nuttall, of Oldham, observed that—

the London people were their thinkers, and that united action between London and the North was what was wanted.

Alexander MacLeod, of Woolwich, who reported that they were trying to form several new societies in the North and were continually asking for information, observed :—

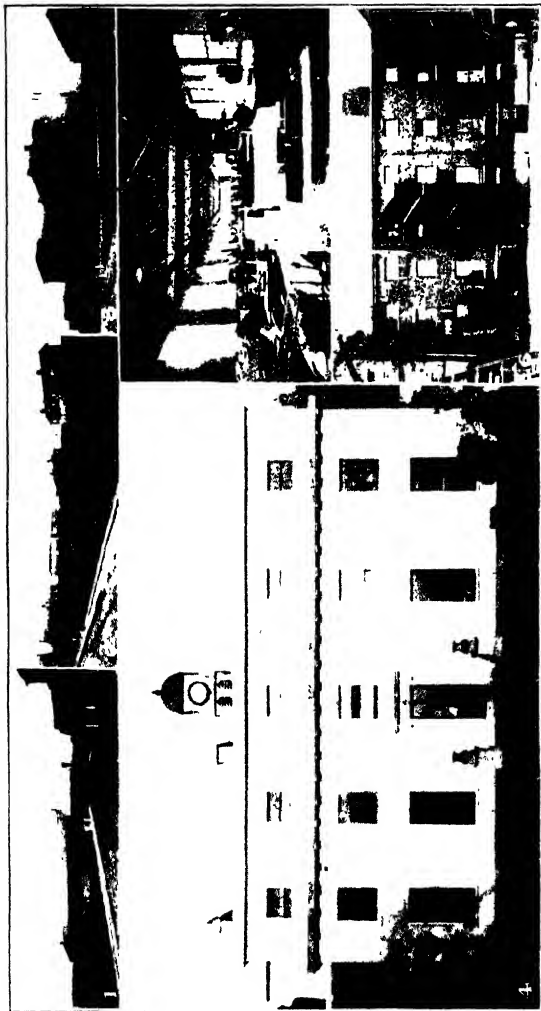
If practical co-operation was in the North [remarked this far-seeing Scotchman] thoughtful co-operation was in London.

Abraham Greenwood, of Rochdale, thought that a Council in London co-operating with the North would meet the case—a recognition by the representative of the Rochdale Pioneers' Society of the service that was being rendered by those who had secured the first Industrial and Provident Societies Act.



THE EDUCATION COMMITTEE OF THE L.C.S.

*Left to right:* Messrs J. Rayner, A. E. F. Wilson, W. Godfrey, L. Mansfield (Vice-Chairman), W. T. Symmonds, F. Keddie, and C. E. Prater.  
*Right:* Mrs. S. Holmes, Mrs. M. Critton, Mrs. M. Fowler, Mr. J. F. Redhouse (Chairman), Mrs. M. Whitlow-Bagot, Mrs. A. Warner. Dr. C. K. Cullen and Mr. J. Granley were absent when the photograph was taken.  
*Photography by:* *Ward & Co., East Ham.*



THE CO-OPERATIVE INDUSTRIAL COLONY AND EDUCATIONAL HEADQUARTERS AT MANOR PARK.  
 1. Main Roadway and Works Department. 2. The Lawn. 3. The Dairy. 4. The Manor House, Check and Education Offices. 5. Joiners' Shop. 6. Rear view of Boot Repairing and Upholstering Works, with emergency stairs.  
*[Jarvis & Co.]*



Out of that Congress the Co-operative Union evolved, with E. V. Neale as secretary. Owing to the number of societies operating in Lancashire and Yorkshire its office was opened in Manchester, whither Neale went to guide and help the movement for many years.

London, however, gave the modern series of Co-operative Congresses a real start, and the editing of the report by J. M. Ludlow, constituted the basis of the subsequent volumes. Thus the record of the Movement has been written for future historians who, like J. R. Green, have seen the History of the English People, not in the wars of the kings and monarchs, but in the social organisation of the workaday world.

That Congress of 1869 was a great event in Co-operative History. It emphasised the tripartite resolution of the Christian Socialists which, for many subsequent years, appeared as the basis of the Co-operative Union.

First.—That human society is a body consisting of many members, not a collection of warring atoms.

Second.—That true workmen must be fellow-workers, and not rivals.

Third.—That a principle of justice not of selfishness must govern exchanges.

In 1875 a Co-operative Congress was again held in London. This was made notable by the presence for the first time of a delegation from the Parliamentary Committee of the Trade Union Congress. This has been repeated at every subsequent Congress. The two annual assemblies of the democratic movements began about the same time. As already mentioned trade unionists were on the organising committee of the first Co-operative Congress in 1869; at the conference in St. Martin's Hall, Long Acre, in 1867, from which arose the Trade Union Congress, the Co-operative Tin Plate Workers' Society of Lincoln's Inn was represented.

It was in the same hall that Joseph Mazzini, Karl Marx, and others, had met to weld the European

democracies into an international alliance ; there the co-operators of 1851 had met to consider the passing of the Industrial and Friendly Societies Bill ; later it passed into the possession of the Agricultural and Horticultural Association, giving evidence of the practical application of the co-operative idea. Thus we see how the co-operative and trade union ideas commingled in London when both organisations were coming into definite form. These are so interdependent that it is difficult to distinguish a line of demarcation.

Sometimes, like a pair of scissors, co-operators and trade unionists may seem to go in different directions ; but they will not tolerate anything that comes between them. The friendship of the two movements that found expression in the London Congresses of 1867 and 1869, continues to be manifest in every shop, department, and venture of the London Co-operative Society. That amity has passed out of the channels of abstract resolutions into the actual routine of the world of to-day. The Co-operative Tin Plate Workers' Society has gone, but the soul of association, for which its 300 members stood, is like John Brown's spirit, still " marching on." And the modern trade unionist is falling into line with the co-operative contingent making for the Commonwealth.

#### WHOLESALE CO-OPERATION.

There was an exhibition in connection with the Congress. This was held over Tweedie's Temperance Bookshop, in the Strand. Some of the enthusiasts sought to continue the Exhibition as a permanent Co-operative Bazaar. Hodgson Pratt paid the first week's rent, and it developed for a while as the Central Co-operative Agency, at 337, Strand. Robert Sanders was the manager ; at the Manchester Congress the following year he arranged another display of co-operative goods, and in 1871 the question of the extension of the Agency was brought forward, it being mentioned that the stock was £1,000. In 1872

the Agency was turned over to the Central Co-operative Agency, Ltd., at the Co-operative Hall at 55, Castle Street East. By 1875 the Co-operative Congress exhibitions were assuming a definite form. The meetings that year were held in the Co-operative Institute, 55, Castle Street East, and along the walls were ranged goods produced by various societies, all of which, with the single exception of the C.W.S., have since gone out of existence. The development of the present Wholesale Co-operation may be considered in conjunction with this Agency. For it struggled along till 1874, when the Co-operative Wholesale Society, having decided to open a London branch, took over its stock, and made a small monetary payment "in consideration of their giving up the wholesale business." In March, 1874, Mr. B. Jones, with the late Wm. Openshaw, were installed in the new C.W.S. branch at 118, Minories, E. In the summer of 1879, the foundation stone of the premises in Leman Street, E., was laid by Tom Hughes, and early in 1881 business was commenced. These were extended in 1887, and premises taken on the other side of the road for the Tea Department of the two Wholesale Societies—English and Scottish. The position of the London branch of the C.W.S. in the commercial life of London is well assured. In 1927 it had a turnover of £26,000,000, being nearly one-third of the trade of the federation of societies.

The London branch is an impressive memorial to the thousands of unknown co-operators whose custom and savings have brought it to its present prestige. The building gives architectural dignity to the humdrum thoroughfares of Aldgate; in Kingsway, and in Westminster its insurance and banking departments stand well in the public confidence.

Just before, and after, 1860, the societies of the North and the South felt the need of a Co-operative Wholesale. But although the Act of 1852 had legalised co-operative societies it had not anticipated their rapid and successful

development. The widening of their usefulness was hampered by restrictions on the purchase of property and the prohibition of investments in the funds of other societies. For a couple of years conferences were held about Manchester and Oldham in which the representatives of societies urged the formation of a federation as soon as the law could be altered. Southern co-operators—though small numerically and without the opportunities for extensive trade possessed in the crowded industrial towns—considered the matter from their own point of view. In November, 1861, the East London Society, then at Stepney, "in conjunction with others at the east of London, have done business in coal from the first markets, and the result they anticipate will be the formation of an 'East Central Wholesale Department.'" John Allen, of Paddington, had, a month before, suggested a Co-operative Wholesale formed of societies, with a chairman elected by the whole of the country, and the committee consisting of four persons—one for each of the four divisions, N. E. W. and S., into which he proposed the country to be divided. The idea was to have a wharf on the Thames, and "London being the great commercial city of the world I would make it the centre." Later a plea was put in for Liverpool and the Mersey. Meanwhile Lancashire co-operators were getting into touch with E. Vansittart Neale in London, and James Smithies and Charles Howarth—two of the Rochdale Pioneers—were appointed to see him with respect to legislation calculated to enable the formation of a Co-operative Wholesale Society. This was registered in 1863.

It was fortunate for those concerned with the establishment of the Co-operative Wholesale Society that they had sympathetic legal friends like Ludlow, Neale, and Hughes. These three had piloted the Industrial and Provident Societies Act of 1852, and knew the co-operative movement as thoroughly as did any of these actually on committees. Two of them had been engaged in the organisation of the Central

Co-operative Agency which commenced business in October, 1850. In order to keep within the law E. V. Neale and T. Hughes were appointed trustees, M. Le Chevalier as the manager, with James Woodin and Lloyd Jones as the special partners of the Agency which was to trade as the firm of Woodin, Jones & Co., at 76, Charlotte Street, Fitzroy Square.

A meeting was held at Leeds in August, 1853, when a plan for establishing a Wholesale Central Dépôt was discussed. There were 23 societies represented, including the retail stores at Halifax, Leeds, Kirkheaton, and Rochdale, and nine co-operative productive ventures (printers, brewers, builders, engineers, needlewomen, tailors, and shoemakers) in London as well as the Association for promoting Industrial and Provident Societies, and the Central Co-operative Agency. It was reported that the success of the co-operative associations

where established in other parts of the kingdom has been greater than in London, a circumstance probably in great measure due to their having grown more completely out of the efforts of those who work in them.

Lloyd Jones later went on a tour in Lancashire and Yorkshire to bring the co-operative societies into closer union with one another, and with the Central Co-operative Agency, then operating from 356, Oxford Street, London, W. A year later the Agency appointed a Heywood co-operator

to travel along the co-operative stores in the country, it having been found that the stores were falling much into the hands of unprincipled dealers whom they had no means of controlling, and that they were not properly aware of the advantages to be secured by connection with the Agency.

E. V. Neale, and others, who believed in co-operation, had advanced money to groups of workmen; and lost thousands of pounds in that way. Out of the £13,560 capital of the Central Co-operative Agency, in its first year, only £480 had been found by the people for whose direct benefit it was established. Later

Kingsley acknowledged his disappointment with the co-operators of London, "though," as he wrote, "they have been helped and petted. Perhaps that is the very reason they have failed." He was right in that view. For the strength of the Sheerness co-operators of 1816, and of the other societies that were in existence when the Rochdale Pioneers accumulated their little capital was rooted in their self-reliance and independence. The supply of capital by others did not give the permanent results that followed the sacrifice of those who stinted and saved to provide the necessary funds to carry on their own shops. History repeated itself when the persistent progress of the Stratford, Edmonton, and West London societies maintained the co-operative tradition of self-help.

#### EDUCATIONAL IMPULSE AND PRODUCTIVE REVIVAL.

The Working Men's College arose directly out of the lessons which Maurice and his friends had learned in connection with the co-operative workshops, and the various associative efforts they had fostered in the years following the Chartist failure of 1848. It was at a meeting at Maurice's house in Queen Square, Bloomsbury, early in 1854, that Hughes proposed, and Lloyd Jones seconded, a proposal to carry out "a plan for the establishment of a People's College in connection with the Metropolitan associations." Thirty-five years after, in a lecture given to co-operators in the hall of the College, then in Great Ormond Street, he said that he and his friends had discovered, by 1854, "that the working men in London were not then ready for association." Hence the decision to found a College where men from the Universities could meet with working people to learn from each other.

First at Red Lion Square, then in Great Ormond Street, and now at Crowndale Road, St. Pancras, the Working Men's College has proved a radiating influence for co-operation in knowledge and in life itself.

The impetus it gave has never failed. Later its

idea was developed by Edward Denison and John Richard Green, when they went to live among the people in Stepney. Then when the friends of Arnold Toynbee gave him memorial in Toynbee Hall, the old idea was revived in the University Settlements whose residents became associated with co-operative societies, as had the Christian Socialists. The Rev. T. G. Gardiner, of Toynbee Hall, was for many years the president of the old Tower Hamlets Society. When, following the Dock Strike of 1889, there came an outcrop of efforts for co-operative production in East London, the Toynbee men worked in the spirit of the Victorians. There were co-operative societies formed among the cigar makers, stick and umbrella workers, portmanteau makers, mantle makers, cabinet makers, engineers, builders, clothiers, and the bassdressers. Only the latter have survived. They continue to do good work in Stepney, while, in the Bloomsbury region, the Co-operative Bookbinders Ltd. maintain something of the spirit of the old handicrafts, when industry and art were one.

Here, mention may be made of the final concerted effort to establish workmen's productive associations on co-operative lines. The Co-operative Aid Association helped; so did the Co-operative Productive Federation of which Thomas Blandford—whose generous devotion is recalled in the Blandford Memorial at the annual Co-operative Congress—was secretary. The British Bone Brush Manufacturers had 15 employees in 1902; three years later the Excelsior Tank Makers of East Ham had an annual turnover of £1,259; but lacked access to a commercial world. The desk on which this History is written was made by the Co-operative Cabinet Makers of Bethnal Green, and other societies that arose, and did well for a time, were the London General Engineers, the Co-operative Mosaic Workers, the Co-operative Photographers, the Co-operative Builders, the Electrical Engineers, and the Typewriters. But they all succumbed. It has remained

for the L.C.S. to demonstrate that an organisation of consumers can most successfully develop the production suited to its requirements—with a market ready to hand. That 2,000 of the 6,500 present employees of the society are engaged in production and similar service, suggests the way of co-operative productive development for the future—in some places locally, in other cases nationally.

Thus we record the service rendered to co-operation by the Christian Socialists who, when co-operation had few friends outside its own ranks, helped to give it understanding, to inspire it with a great moral and social purpose, to legalise it in the eyes of the law, and to weld the distributive societies together for their Wholesale advantage. Many of their efforts seemed unavailing at the time, but, to-day, the Co-operative Movement in the Metropolis is their memorial.





Mr. G. L. BANKS  
Secretary



Mr. W. G. DAINES  
Financial Secretary



Mr. S. FOSTER  
General Manager



Mr. JOSEPH MASON  
President



Mr. J. N. WEBSTER  
Assistant Manager



Mr. J. W. MCGILL, JP  
Secretary



Mr. W. HARNWELL  
Political Committee

THE CHIEF OFFICERS OF THE LONDON CO-OPERATIVE  
SOCIETY, 1928.



MR. A. C. ADAMS



MRS. H. C. ADAMS



MR. W. J. ADAMS



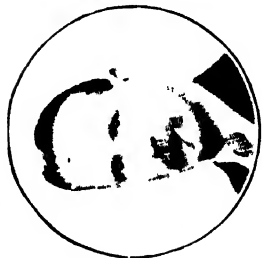
MR. W. C. ADAMS



MR. F. W. FORDHAM



MR. T. A. ADAMS



MR. S. ADAMS



MR. W. W. FASHMAN



MR. C. W. BAILEY



MR. F. G. ASHER



MR. W. W. FASHMAN



MRS. M. EGAN



MRS. C. S. GANDY



MR. C. E. PRATER

*These, with Mr. W. Bailey and the President, constitute the*  
**GENERAL COMMITTEE, L.C.S.**



MR. W. H. ELLIOTT  
Manager, Stratford Society



MR. NEWTON E. SMITH  
Secretary,  
Edmonston Society



MR. ALFRED BARNES, M.P.  
President of the Stratford and  
first President of the L.C.S.



MR. W. HENRY BROWN  
Hon. Secretary, Education  
Committee,  
Stratford Society, 1895-1916



MR. P. S. G. PROBERT, M.A.  
President, West London  
Society



MR. GEO. COFFIN  
Secretary,  
West London Society

SOME OF THE MEN WHO MADE THE WAY FOR THE L.C.S.

## CHAPTER VI.

### IN THE SIXTIES.

FOLLOWING the Industrial and Provident Society of 1862 was an outburst of co-operative societies. The Working Men's College had given to the industrial classes of London much the same educational impetus that Arnold Toynbee gave the modern co-operative movement in 1882, when he fired the inspiration along which it has since developed. Throughout the country co-operative stores were growing in strength and stability in towns where the population had settled industries. The security given by the 1852 Act was proving the value of legislation in protecting the prudent from being victimised by the unscrupulous. Thus the combination of fuller knowledge and legal assurance enabled the societies to steer a safer course than those of pre-Victorian years. Writing in 1862, G. R. Skene gave as an explanation of the failure of the first London society that "in the absence of the present laws for the promotion of trading societies of workmen it fell blighted by dishonesty unpunishable"—as did many of its successors—until Parliament took notice.

#### A CONTRAST—NORTH AND SOUTH.

Henry Pitman, who, like his brother Isaac, the inventor of shorthand, was an earnest co-operative advocate, published in *The Co-operator* of October 15th, 1867, a Co-operative Directory which showed that there were 560 societies with a membership of 173,588 in the English counties doing business at the end of 1866; 724 had then been registered since 1862; no less than 125 had been dissolved. Of the societies that were actually

trading 135 with 86,340 members were in Lancashire, and 137 with 39,388 associates were in Yorkshire. These two counties had 125,728 co-operators—70 per cent of the membership in the whole of England.

The contrast of Lancashire and Yorkshire with Middlesex and Essex shows very clearly how thoroughly the growing industrial populations of the North were adapted for the growth of co-operation. For in the migratory areas of the South there were 43 with a membership of 1,635 in Middlesex and eight in Essex with 1,065 members. Of these 51 societies in Middlesex and Essex only one—that of Stratford—survived into the present century, and the registered office of the L.C.S. in Maryland Street is the sole connecting link with the co-operators of the early sixties of the last century.

Many of the societies in the Metropolitan area during the decennial period 1860–1870 were formed by groups of men who had some knowledge of one another in the religious, temperance, and friendly society movements. Others were helped by public-spirited people who recognised the educational value of co-operative efforts. A society of 123 members in Wandsworth opened a shop in the evenings for a few weeks. It was emboldened to keep open all day when a local gentleman gave the committee 1,500 books as a library to which the co-operators had access on payment of a penny a week. There was a Teetotal Working Men's Co-operative Industrial Society in connection with the Good Samaritan Temperance Hall in Little Saffron Hill that managed to pay a dividend of 10d. on a trade of £796 in 1860. In Goldsmith Road, Hackney, the Good Intent Co-operative Stores found the road to dissolution paved with the good resolutions of the few and the indifference of the many. The Citizen Co-operators Provident and Industrial Society was formed at a meeting in the Temperance Hall, Bishopsgate, among the speakers being the secretary of the London Co-operative Steam Dyeing and Bleaching Society. Not all the early societies were on a temperance foundation. My father,

Thomas Brown—who later was a member of the Council of the Guild of Co-operators, and from whose papers, records, and contemporary newspaper cuttings I have culled much of the information in this chapter—was connected with a society at Barking in the early sixties. It was next door to a public house, and to the habit of many of the members in mistaking the door of the inn for that of their own shop he attributed its own subsequent liquidation.

There was a vigour in the advocacy of some of the local leaders that must have roused the disdain of many of the cultured friends of the movement. At one of the meetings of the St. George's in the East Society, a speaker, in showing the material benefits of co-operation, declared that

the poorest might, like some insects, eat themselves into a habitation. Restless and disaffected members should be allowed to explode harmlessly.

Evidently the speaker had had experience of the business meetings at which complaints and adverse criticism formed the stock theme. Many of the early ventures were weakened by the disheartening effects of those who expected perfection in a society of imperfect persons.

#### A VARIETY OF EFFORTS.

Leicester Square had the West London Co-operative Trading Society at 45, Berwick Street, in 1861, and a Chelsea society did a three months' trade of £522 on a capital of £58 supplied by 120 members. Every Saturday night the Finsbury Co-operative Society opened a store for its 25 members at 66, Bunhill Row. There was a Commercial Co-operative Society at 32, Prescott Street, Minories, within a few doors of the present offices of the Southern Section of the Co-operative Union. It began in 1861, and finished soon after. The capital was only £29, but it was able to give a dividend of 1s. 6d. on the first quarter's trade. A society at 78, Titchfield Street,

was called the All Souls' Co-operative Society. They numbered 106 at the end of 1865; evidently the possessors of many of the souls in the neighbourhood were negligent of the co-operative cloudland. All Souls failed to materialise. Among the other co-operative ventures of the decade were a Kensington and Nottingham Hill Society, which was able to celebrate its fourth anniversary with a public tea and concert; a Great Western and Paddington society where the railwaymen tried to emulate their *confrères* of the Great Eastern and Stratford; similarly there was a Caledonian and Great Northern society at King's Cross; a North London Self-Supplying Society among the members of a Foresters' lodge; and the St. John's Wood Society, whose members were sufficiently numerous to "fill nine vans" on an excursion to Windsor. North Woolwich, too, had its society; while in 1868 the Royal Arsenal Society made a start on its great career, and Alexander McLeod, who ultimately became its greatest asset, journeyed across the river to Stratford to learn something of co-operative management. Considerable attention was given by the *Standard* in 1867 to the fact that a co-operative society in Rood Lane, Fenchurch Street, was supplying the best meat at 8½d. per lb. as compared with the 10d. and one shilling charged by the ordinary butchers of the district—then of a more residential character than now.

#### EAST LONDON SOCIETIES.

East London was full of co-operative societies in those years. The times were full of excitement; for the Volunteer movement stirred the apathy of the masses. Some turned to soldiering for defence against an invasion that never came; others sought protection against the exploiters at home. Hence the many societies, including that of Stratford, which arose at that period. There was one in Sussex Street, Poplar, which commenced business in an underground kitchen. Trade came so briskly that, in five weeks, a small shop was ~~was~~ ken at a rental of 10s. per week. This was



reduced to a cost of 3s. weekly by letting a portion to one of the 46 members. In thirteen weeks they had a turnover of £85; expenses were £79. Out of the difference they paid 1s. 4d. dividend, and set the few shillings that remained as the nucleus of an educational fund.

One of the sturdiest of the co-operative organisations of the Sixties was the East London Co-operative and Industrial Society. It began in April, 1860, with 26 members, whose weekly share contributions were 3d. each. They opened at a member's house, at 2, Ocean Street, Stepney, and managed to pay a 7d. dividend. Then the membership more than doubled to 57, and they took a shop the following year. Later it removed to Poplar, where it maintained a hard existence for many years. James O'Shaughnessy, an old Chartist, was, for many years, its leading light. In February, 1900, writing from his home in Canning Town, he sent me a letter which gave an inkling of the migratory nature of the London workmen when Co-operation was struggling for a place. It also suggests the faith that guided many of the enthusiasts in their difficult task of undertaking their own shopkeeping.

I was a member of the old Canning Town store. The first society I joined was one in Cleveland Street, Fitzroy Square, in 1859, and I brought my goods weekly to Commercial Road, where I was living. In 1860-61 there were articles in *Reynolds* on co-operative societies which set thoughtful men to work, and several societies were formed—the West London, North London, British (in the city), Tower Hamlets, Poplar, East London, Stratford (flour only), and later, the Woolwich. These societies felt the need for better purchasing keenly. They were duped by merchants—chests of tea were good at the top but bad below. The East London Society was requested to call the societies together. A tea meeting was held at the Edinburgh Castle, Stepney, and Dr. Bowkett, of Building Society fame, came to lecture to us. This led us to supply articles to others.

A Tower Hamlets Co-operative Society began to collect share capital in February, 1860. The members

decided to open a shop when they got together £40 ; after a few months

As the society (so ran the report in the local paper) had no place of business, the sale of newspapers and periodicals was fixed upon as the most convenient and profitable speculation. Mr. Waters offered a room in his house, 63, Church Street Mile End, New Town.

The committee continued to add to the articles on sale, and business of between £4 and £5 a week was done. At the end of three months a dividend of 2s. 5d. was paid. It opened the eyes of the members to the profits that the private tradesmen were taking from their customers. But it succumbed. Twenty years later another Tower Hamlets Society was established. That prospered for many years. Then, it faded out ; many of its people joined the Stratford Society, and many of their sons and daughters are now in the L.C.S.

Early in the Sixties Holyoake and Ebenezer Edger tried to organise a union of the scattered co-operative societies of London. They held meetings at the Raglan Coffee House, 71, Theobald's Road, and published the *Social Economist* in the interests of the score of co-operative societies actually doing business in the North and East London. Ultimately, in 1863, a London Association for the Promotion of Co-operation was formed. Its honorary members included J. S. Mill, F. W. Newman (brother of the Cardinal), E. V. Neale, and Tom Hughes. The headquarters were at 59, Britannia Street, City Road, E.C. Its first tangible result was the formation of the Metropolitan and Home Counties Purchasing Association—a federation of nine societies dealing in groceries, provisions, and drysaltery, with offices in Eastcheap. Later this removed to 9, Bell's Yard, Doctors' Commons. In 1868, it held a conference with the societies roundabout London ; that at Stratford was unrepresented for, in those years, the society which laid the foundation of the present L.C.S. kept much to itself.

## ONE AND ALL.

One of the new forces in Metropolitan co-operation who came to the fore at the Congress of 1869 was Edward Owen Greening. He had migrated from Manchester to London the year before, and until his death at Lewisham in 1923, he was an outstanding influence in the movement. In the north he often acted as host to his friend, Tom Hughes. They frequently spoke from the same co-operative platform of Lancashire societies. Travelling back to Manchester they discussed the fraudulent practices wrought on the farmers and cultivators by the purveyors of seeds, fertilisers, and feeding stuffs. Hughes put the matter before the Hon. W. Cowper Temple (the stepson of Lord Palmerston), and met with such response to the suggestion of co-operative effort to stay the abuse that Greening was invited to London to form the Agricultural and Horticultural Association. The members of its Council included James Beal, who afterwards attacked the hoary and discredited Metropolitan Board of Works, and led the Reform campaign which gave us the London County Council. The Agricultural and Horticultural Association Ltd., until its expiration in 1915, was familiarly known as the "One and All"—this Cornish motto having been suggested by Walter Morrison, one of its Council members who was M.P. for Plymouth. The offices of the "One and All" became the rallying ground of co-operators throughout London and the South. It thus linked the older generation with the present London centres of the Co-operative Union and the Co-operative Wholesale Society. In fact, Greening did much to bring the first into being, and to induce the second to the establishment of the London branch. He initiated the long series of National Co-operative Festivals at the Crystal Palace, and many of the preliminary meetings convened in connection with the International Co-operative Congress of 1895 were held in the offices of the "One and All" Association. That Congress, like the Co-operative

Congress of 1869, was held in the rooms of the Society of Arts. Thus London was the birthplace of the International Co-operative Alliance.

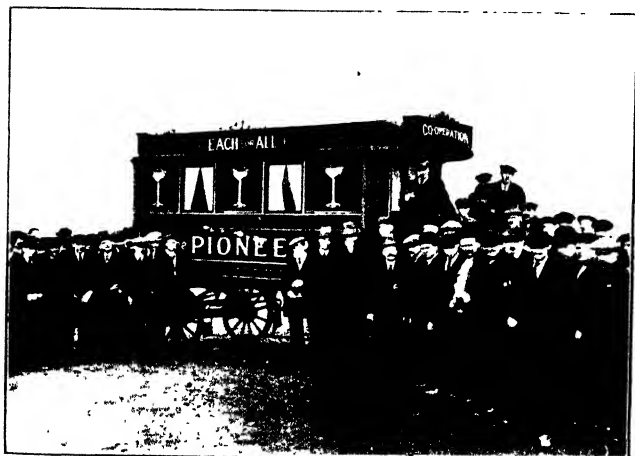
When Greening gave his presidential address at the Stratford Congress in 1904, he recalled that when he came to London in 1868 there was "only one industrial co-operative society in the neighbourhood of the Metropolis which could boast a degree of success." That, of course, was the Stratford Society, which in eight years had gained a membership of 278 men—not a woman's name on the share ledger—whose capital totalled £1,091, and whose annual trade was less than £3,500. They were, however, paying an encouraging dividend of rs. 6d. in the £ on members' purchases. Greening lived to see, and to applaud, the unity and the advance secured by the L.C.S.

#### THE DAY OF SMALL THINGS.

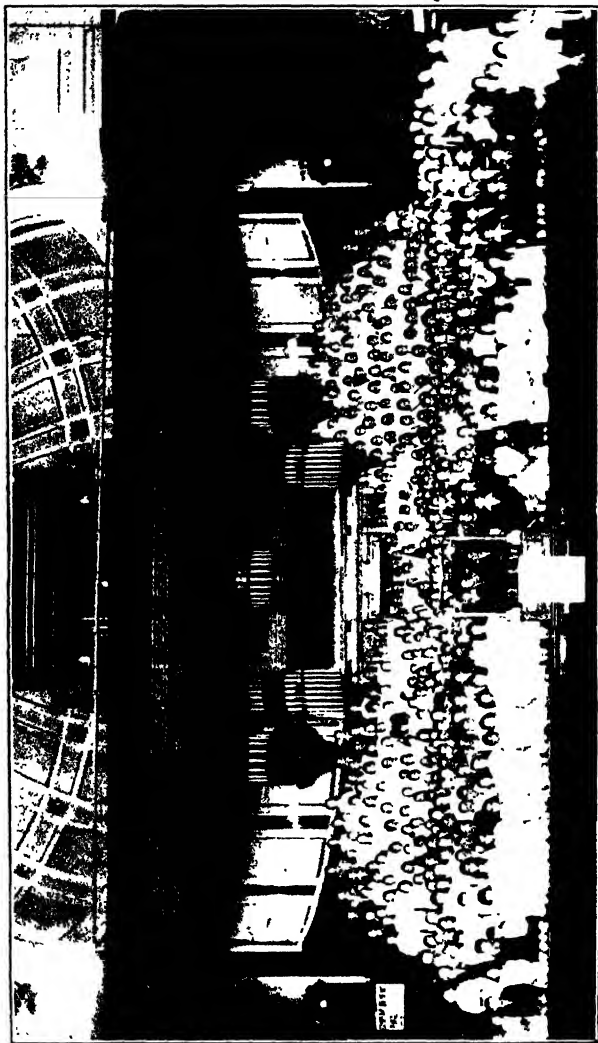
Sufficient has been written to indicate the variety of societies started in London; and all coming to a similar ending. Most of them failed owing to the enthusiasts who knew little of business, opening shops with inadequate capital, unsuitable stocks, uninformed service, and the inefficiency which came naturally from premature efforts to establish new business. In some cases the committees were badly treated by managers, in whom they trusted; in many the wives were not impressed by the shopping facilities provided by their husbands. The dividend drew for a time; but when the dividend disappeared the society generally followed into obscurity. Following the Congress of 1869 there was a greater care in getting capital before starting, but the following ten years bring the same story of lost hopes. The veterans did not disappear. Men who had lost their savings in one society would venture again, making great sacrifices with little resources. At one of the educational gatherings of the L.C.S. during last winter there was a great company of young men and women who had been studying economics and industrial



The Walthamstow Departmental Store of the L.C.



Proclaiming the Co-operative Message from the Pioneer Van.



The L. C. S. Children's Circle Massed Choir at the People's Palace, Mile End, on International  
Co-operators' Day. Mr. Altre's Seats (Conductor)

history. A new aspect came over their subject, and gave it a poignant meaning when we recalled some of the early co-operative societies. Mr. and Mrs. Elliott—both in their eightieth year—were asked by the chairman of the L.C.S. education committee, Mr. J. F. Redhouse, to recount their experience—

“Well, we lost in one society in Bethnal Green ; and then we started another in Hackney—and lost our little savings once more,” said the husband. “Yes !” added Mrs. Elliott, “and then I started saving again so that Edwin could set co-operation on its feet once more. And in the old University Club Society, and in the Clapton Park Society, we lost some more—but we made heaps of friends, and we worked our hardest to brighten this mad old world.”

And the two old co-operators then declared, almost in chorus,

“This London Society was of our building—we people, who, forty, and thirty, and twenty years ago, made the foundations that you young Comrades in Co-operation enjoy.”

Their voices grew tremulous ; and their eyes were not the only eyes that glistened with tears of happiness that day.

## CHAPTER VII.

### CIVIL SERVICE CO-OPERATION.

THE decade from 1860 to 1870 was a great harvest of co-operation in London. In 1860 the Stratford Co-operative Society was formed at the railway works of the Great Eastern Railway Company just over the Metropolitan boundary of the Lea. At that time the Industrial and Provident Societies Act, which legalised co-operative societies, and gave security to their funds, had been in operation eight years. Its safeguarding of savings—to adopt a current phraseology—was encouraging the formation of small societies everywhere. All the London parishes had their groups of associated consumers. But the opposition of the traders was keen in virulence, and menacing to the livelihoods of the practitioners of the new form of trading. Then in 1866 came a middle, or professional class incursion into retail business. The system of the Civil Service stores brought a new competitor into London, intensified the hostility of the leaders of commerce against all forms of association, and confused the public mind as to which was the genuine co-operation.

The adherents of the Co-operative Bazaars evolving from the London Co-operative Society of 1824 to 1834; the founders of the Lennoxton Victualling Society of 1812, the Sheerness Society of 1816, the Meltham Mills Society of 1827, and the Rochdale Pioneers of 1844; the Christian Socialists who secured the Industrial and Provident Societies Act of 1852; and the railwaymen of Stratford, who co-operated in 1860, regarded the division of the surplus among the customers to whose trading it was chiefly due as the natural



sharing of such advantage. They also recognised that the working people who constituted the membership of the stores had little capital; and their only means of becoming the possessors of adequate resources to establish a New Co-operative Order was to accumulate such dividends at the end of short periods—quarterly reckoning became the usual limit. Hence the continuation of the system of quarterly meetings by the L.C.S., although the accounting term is now one of six months.

Civil servants, officers of the Navy and Army, barristers, doctors, and clergymen had, from their clubs and armchairs, seen the economic merits of the co-operative system. So they deflected its original purpose of saving the dividend to the immediate use of securing lower prices on purchases. Stores were established to which, for many years, only the civil service and professional people, were admitted. They readily found the capital and the principle upon which the new "co-operative" Civil Service stores were reared was that of selling to members at rates just sufficiently above the cost price to cover estimated working expenses. They exercised a salutary effect upon the enterprising tradesmen who were just beginning to add shop to shop until they blossomed as "universal providers." Examination of the files of the daily journals of the period proves the sensation that was created when the servants of the Crown sought this form of protection from the taxpaying traders who scooped too large a proportion of their salaries over the counter. Agitation was organised to muzzle such activities. But the traders found that the permanent officials of Whitehall, and the gentry who dwelt in the West End had official influence stronger than that of the shopkeepers. So the Civil Service stores continued to exist and expand to the changing times. Only this year one of them has adopted a plan of giving Life Assurance policies to its £1 a week customers—a belated endorsement of the Death Benefits Scheme that

the L.C.S. has operated since its first week as a united institution.

Having thus recognised the imitative quality of the Civil Service stores we may leave them alone. They are mentioned as an incidental phase of London's co-operative development—nothing more so far as this History of the London Movement is concerned.

Most of the "adaptors" of the co-operative idea to their own commercial convenience established large departmental stores. The purpose of those whose principles and practice are prescribed in these pages was to supply the daily necessities from shops and depôts within easy reach of the members. This is being done by the London Co-operative Society from over 300 shops, including the following :—

Grocery .....	135	Drapery .....	26	Hardware ...	17
Butchery ....	57	Clothing .....	24	Furnishing ...	10
Bread .....	19	Boots .....	25	Cafés .....	2
Greengrocery.	9	Coal depôts ..	26	Hairdressing..	2

The Traffic Department is responsible for a mileage of 22,500 per week, and undertakes household removals as well as catering for excursion and wedding parties.

A new branch of the society was opened every ten days during 1927, and the programme for 1928 includes the opening of another score of butchery shops. In connection with the latter the L.C.S. is the largest retailer of home-killed meat in the Metropolis. During the war period, when the combines were attempting to get the control of the meat supplies, the society's butchery manager, Mr. J. Hobson, established direct dealings with the farmers in a way that has proved beneficial to producers and consumers.

When we contrast London Co-operation with other forms of shopkeeping it is well to recognise how closely it brings together those interests that the middleman endeavours to keep apart.

## CHAPTER VIII.

# THE GUILD OF CO-OPERATORS.

FOR nearly twenty years, from 1878 to 1895, the Guild of Co-operators was the energising force in London and the south of England. Towards the end of the Christian Socialist era some of the Owenites had tried to create a propaganda organisation, and in 1853 a Co-operative Association was formed at 58, Pall Mall, with James Rigby, Robert Owen's most faithful friend, as the secretary. But it fizzled out for lack of practical application. So, too, did the Co-operative League of 1858, which was formed to promote "the diffusion of co-operative principles." Co-operative enthusiasm was becoming organised after the formation of the Co-operative Union. As the various sections of the Central Board of that body became largely representative of the official elements, the place of the ardent advocates was taken by the men of narrower views and more practical purpose than the idealists who swayed the public to the stores.

Then Hodgson Pratt, who was promulgating the notion of social co-operation through the Club and Institute Union, suggested the formation of a Guild of Co-operators. This was to enlist the help of friends able to advocate the principle and advise the practitioners. When necessary, they were to admonish the earnest people who started stores with insufficient capital, and worked them by improvident methods. The Guild was formed in 1878, at a meeting on the premises of the Club and Institute Union, then at 150, Strand. Mr. Ben. Jones was hon. secretary, and, later, Charles Cooper. They had offices at 35, Russell

Street, Covent Garden, in conjunction with a friendly society of which Cooper was the secretary.

Under the leadership of Hodgson Pratt, the Guild united in a common interest the people who were, in their various localities, actually organising co-operative stores, and the public men and women willing to give their time and talents in addressing meetings and attending conferences. In those days the co-operators lacked the platform qualities they now possess. The London Co-operative Society has its own M.P's., its own County and Borough Councillors, its own Guildswomen and Guildsmen able to state the case for co-operation. Apart from its own nominees for legislative and administrative authorities, it has about fifty members who sit on local governing bodies.

#### FRIENDS OF FIFTY YEARS AGO.

But the co-operators of fifty years ago were halting in their public utterance, and were glad of the help of the Guild, which from 1878 to 1895 did great things for the movement. To the nucleus of seasoned workers were added friends like the Marquis of Ripon, Miss Margaret Llewelyn Davies, Alfred (afterwards Lord) Milner, A. H. Dyke Acland (the founder of the Co-operative and Labour Travelling scholarships), and a goodly company of enthusiasts who sacrificed much to spread the co-operative gospel. The Earl of Rosebery, Lord Brassey, H. J. Vansittart Neale and others contributed to its resources.

Soon after the Guild got to work some of the grocers became alarmed, and a London Grocers' Co-operative Wholesale Society was formed, registered under the Industrial and Provident Societies Act. In 1881 it was doing a business of £100,000 a year despite the efforts of the wholesale firms in the trade to boycott its members. The society secured a share capital of £4,861 from about 600 retail grocers, who denounced the co-operation of their customers, while seeking to adopt the principle for their own advantage. But the pressure

of the wholesale firms was heavy; and the grocers attempt to co-operate was crushed out in a couple of years.

About the same time a Clergy Co-operative Association came into existence; followed by a Ladies' Co-operative Association, all the first shareholders in which, with one exception, were widows; and a Nonconformists' Co-operative Association. There was also a Metropolitan Co-operative Society, at 47, Milbank Street, Westminster, with branches at Pimlico and Fulham. All these efforts came to nought, as had the Pimlico and Westminster Society, and the North London Self-Supplying Society of Copenhagen Street, Caledonian Road, a few years before. In connection with some of the clubs in the Working Men's Club and Institute Union, Hodgson Pratt had attempted to form a society with branches at Soho, Spitalfields and elsewhere. The share capital of this modest avenue to the Millennium was raised in instalments of "not less than 3d. per week." The shareholders lost their money, as well as their way.

A few others that had been formed before the start of the Guild of Co-operators struggled in its time. There was the London Perséverance in Marylebone established in 1875; two societies in Brixton founded in 1862 and 1864 respectively, and the Battersea Society dating from 1854.

#### **BATTERSEA FAILS AFTER ITS JUBILEE.**

For 33 years the Battersea and Wandsworth Society pursued its career. It began among the workmen employed in a candle works at Battersea who, after much cautious propaganda, elected a provisional committee in 1854, and decided to start Price's Workmen's Stores, a name that continued for nearly twenty years. Having contracted with a local baker the committee began business in selling bread and potatoes at a shop in Creek Street early in 1855. At that time 312 £1

shares had been taken up and £250 actually paid. Groceries and provisions were added, and in 1860 it was decided to sell drapery two evenings a week in a large room over the shop. Three years later the number of the committee was reduced from 15 to 7 persons and, in 1865, it was decided to open the membership to others than those employed at Price's Patent Candle Company. That led the way to the alteration of the name to that of the Battersea and Wandsworth Co-operative in 1872. Progress continued, and in 1874 the society joined the C.W.S., and, appointing the late T. E. Webb as secretary, entered on a period of expansion. In 1881 the premises of a society that had failed on the Shaftesbury estate, at Lavender Hill, were taken over; although the Battersea co-operators had declined an invitation, two years before, to absorb the Metropolitan Co-operative Society which had branches at Fulham and Pimlico. In 1882 the banking account, which had previously been arranged with the Candle Company, was transferred to the C.W.S. In that year, too, a new bakery was erected from which, in later times, other societies such as that at Westminster, were supplied with bread. The society's highest peak was reached in 1897, when the sales were £27,340. The 1,540 members had £12,397 in share capital, and enjoyed a temporary dividend. Then came the downhill movement; the appointment of the then president as manager was the beginning of internecine struggles that embittered the quarterly meetings, unsettled the members, and led to the withdrawal of share capital and loss of trade. The membership shrank to 691 in 1904, when the sales slipped down to £12,141, and there was a loss of £689. The internal bickerings continued, and the society, once the most promising in the Metropolis, went into voluntary liquidation in 1908. After 54 years of valiant striving, the Battersea Society went out in a great flood of despondency. Much water has flowed under Battersea Bridge since then, and the local branches of the L.C.S., which

came along with the amalgamation of the West London Society testify to the vitality of co-operation.

### THE WORK OF THE GUILD.

By way of illustrating the work of the Guild let us examine its fifteenth annual report for 1892-93, so far as it relates to the Metropolitan activities. Seven new societies formed in the south, including those of Isleworth, West Brompton, and Ealing. Thirty-six meetings had been attended by members of the Guild, those in the London area being at Barnet, Ealing, Fitzroy Square—the district in which Owen had laboured sixty years before, and in which the Central Co-operative Agency had commenced in the Fifties—Isleworth, Lambeth, Parliament Hill, Sydenham, Walthamstow, West Brompton, and Wimbledon. The income of the Guild for the year was £77, of which one-third was given by the Earl of Rosebery, and £10. 7s. 6d. by the Battersea, Barking, Beckton, Bowes Park, Enfield Highway, Kentish Town, Wealdstone, Willesden, Wood Green, and Woolwich and Stratford societies, the latter heading these with £5. 5s. Of these societies only Enfield and Woolwich have endured—north and south of the Stratford Society with which all the other districts are now merged.

In 1892 there were a score of co-operative productive societies in London including the leather workers of Bermondsey, painters at Holloway, glass makers in Edwin Street, Canning Town, boot and shoe makers in Bethnal Green, and co-operative bakery societies in Camden Town and in Brixton. All have gone; the only ones now in existence being the Bass Dressers of Stepney, the Bookbinders in Bloomsbury, and the Co-operative Printing Society then in Salisbury Court, and now in Tudor Street.

Printers have proved persistent co-operators. The Co-operative and Economical Society of 1821 was formed at a meeting of the journeymen printers of

London. There were, at least, three societies of co-operative printers between 1848 and 1854. The poet, Gerald Massey, worked for a while in that located just off Oxford Street. At 4a, Johnson's Court, Fleet Street, there was another in 1852. This endeavoured to organise a Co-operative League to carry its principles further afield. Then in 1867 a Mutual Printing Society was formed in Islington by 106 journeymen printers. Others started, and stopped. But at length permanence was obtained when the London branch of the Co-operative Printing Society Ltd. got going in Tudor Street. It is now flourishing under the direction of ex-Cabinet ministers, co-operators, and trade unionists. The London Co-operative Society's balance sheet is printed at this co-operative establishment; this book is printed at another co-operative printing works. In both of these the L.C.S. has invested some of the share capital not required for its own trade expansion.

There were also two coal co-operative societies in 1892, a Co-operative Institute in Hart Street, off Oxford Street, a Co-operative Aid Association, and a Co-operative Country House Society which rented a house near Woking for the recreation of Metropolitan co-operators who could not afford longer journeys and more expensive holidays. Such a review indicates the varied ways in which the co-operative principle was being expressed.

Here is a table specially compiled to show the slow growth of the London societies before they realised the strength that comes from combination. That they started business with such meagre capital seems almost incredible nowadays. The members were as full of faith as those who founded the Rochdale Pioneers' Society; but the seed sown fell on the stony ground of keen competitive rivalry. The cultivators lived in less close relationship to each other than did the men of Rochdale whose daily association in the mills gave them knowledge of, and confidence in, one another. The migratory habits of the Londoners led to their undoing—as co-operative storekeepers.



Societies assisted by the Guild.	Date of commencing business.	At date of commencement.		December 31st, 1892.			Average Dividend.
		Members.	Capital.	Members.	Capital.	Sales.	
Bermondsey.....	1882	187	£ 141	731	£ 1,199	£ 2,372	—
Tower Hamlets	1882	84	75	1,700	4,758	21,101	11d.
Battersea (York Road Branch)	...	...	...	...	...	3,356	—
Chelsea and Fulham.....	1883	151	150	962	3,319	11,887	—
Beckton .....	1883	70	123	112	362	2,210	6d.
Kensington .....	1885	...	...	518	972	...	—
Child's Hill, Cricklewood ..	1885	98	100	206	748	2,158	—
Southwark .....	1885	...	...	...	...	...	—
Hackney, Borough of ...	1886	87	23	598	1,038	9,232	—
King's Cross.....	1887	154	140	440	453	1,607	—
Kentish Town ...	1887	194	152	400	544	3,136	4d.
Harlesden .....	1888	82	...	68	113	1,025	7d.
Wimbledon ...	1888	130	130	682	2,035	9,323	1/-
University Club..	1888	...	...	652	1,468	5,211	7d.
Barking.....	1888	90	100	...	...	...	—
Wood Green .....	1889	145	130	367	569	5,390	1/0½
Enfield Town ...	1889	120	100	382	822	7,178	1/8
Edmonton .....	1889	110	120	408	604	5,900	1/2
Walthamstow ...	1889	...	...	131	144	1,233	6d.
Bowes Park .....	1890	100	...	192	286	2,620	8d.
Southend .....	1890	100	...	274	898	6,612	8d.
Southall .....	1890	95	110	186	438	...	—
Wealdstone .....	1891	...	...	145	226	2,512	1/3
Westminster.....	1891	280	200	450	381	...	—
New Barnet .....	1891	30	20	...	..	...	—

The final report of the Guild of Co-operators, issued in June, 1895, recounted the assistance rendered to 150 societies which had been formed in the south during its existence. Only 110 had succeeded, and of those in London the most notable were in the Tower Hamlets, and at Chelsea, Wimbledon, Barking, Wood Green, Enfield Town (later absorbed by the flourishing Enfield Highway Society), Edmonton, Southall, Harrow Road, and High Barnet. All these are now reaping the harvest in the L.C.S.

### SOME NOTABLE VENTURES.

Following the cessation of the activities of the Guild of Co-operators came a lull in the formation of societies. But a few new ventures were made. A

society strove at Holloway ; it was rescued by becoming a branch of the Edmonton Society ; the Willesden and District (later known as North West London) similarly took over a store at Neasden. A society at Barnet went astray, and the Edmonton Society extended its delivery plans to help the fallen. In 1893 the Borough of Hackney Society, which, one year, did a trade of £5,000, went out. It had absorbed the South Hackney Society, and then, branching out boldly in two places, stumbled into a financial morass. For a while the members of a political club in Kay Street, Bethnal Green, ran the United Radical Co-operative Society ; but it foundered after a promising launch, as did also the Rock Society, formed by the Irishmen of East London, and a Jewish Co-operative Alliance in White-chapel.

#### WOMEN'S CO-OPERATIVE GUILD.

While the Guild of Co-operators was advocating and advising the formation of societies, it occurred to Mrs. A. H. Dyke Acland (afterwards Lady Acland) that something should be done to interest the women in the work of the movement. Then early in 1883 Mrs. Mary Lawrenson, of Woolwich (who was on the Council of the Guild of Co-operators), suggested the formation of a Women's League. This quickly materialised during that year, and by the winter branches were formed at Woolwich, Norwood, and Chelsea. Battersea followed in 1884, and the Women's Co-operative Guild was fully launched in August of that year. Mrs. Lawrenson took over the secretaryship in 1885. Branches were formed all over the country, and in 1888 the Marylebone branch was represented at the annual meeting by its secretary, Miss Margaret Llewelyn Davies, the daughter of the Rev. J. Llewelyn Davies, then rector of Christ Church, Marylebone, and one of the Christian Socialists of the 1848-54 period. In the following year, Mrs. Lawrenson who, with Mrs. Acland, was a co-founder of the Guild, retired from the

secretaryship, and Miss Davies succeeded to the position which she held with unflagging initiative and zeal till 1921. The headquarters of the Guild are at Hampstead—within the area of the L.C.S.

From 1889 the Women's Co-operative Guild has been an increasing force in the co-operative movement, organising campaigns for better conditions for employees, wider service for members, the care of maternity, greater educational facilities, and voicing the needs and rights of women, especially married working women. In the early years the late Mrs. B. Jones did much to encourage the women members in public speaking—in response to the invitation of the Guild of Co-operators to assist them in "the spread of co-operation round London." Something was done to secure women a place in the councils of the movement, and, in succession, Mrs. Lawrenson (Woolwich), Miss Webb (Battersea), Miss Spooner (Hammersmith), and Mrs. Gasson and Mrs. Bain (London Society), have been among the few women elected to the Central Board of the Co-operative Union.

The Women's Co-operative Guild, and its fraternal organisation, the Men's Co-operative Guild, has a strong membership in the L.C.S., where over 100 branches are making their contribution to the educational influence of association for the improvement of the things that really matter.

## CHAPTER IX.

### SOME EASTERN MEMORIES.

IN the Eighties a wave of philanthropy swept the Metropolis; fashionable Society went a-slumming down East; and the preparations for the Queen's Jubilee caused some searchings of conscience. The Baroness Burdett Coutts was the Lady Bountiful of the period. Among her benefactions was the erection of the Columbia Market in Bethnal Green. It cost half-a-million, and cast an architectural halo over the neighbourhood of mean streets. Lady Coutts started the Columbia Market Co-operative Society. She allowed the members the use of three shops rent free. Their enthusiasm was not very remarkable; and her ladyship discovered, as Lady Byron had done earlier in the century, that co-operation involves independence, and some attachment to a principle. Patronage and philanthropy are not the attributes of the Co-operative Commonwealth. There must be initiative, knowledge, and a recognition of man's interdependence to ensure the stability of its institution. So the Columbia Market Society, cradled in luxury, fell into obscurity. Only once did the members secure a dividend; that was when the Baroness gave them 6*d*. in the £ out of her own resources.

Of all the societies that flickered and fell in Bethnal Green, Mile End, and adjoining divisions in the Eighties, the University Club co-operators, who began the society in 1888, had most grit and backbone. When the end came in 1902 some of the stalwarts risked another store. They raised the sum of £50, and opened a shop, registering the society as the Hackney Society. But

again they were baffled, and the Hackney Society went under in October, 1904, never having paid a dividend. Many of the members joined the society which had been formed at Clapton Park; and which had managed to stand foursquare to the shopkeepers around.

That Clapton Park Society was an important link in the local co-operative chain. It kept going for about eight years with a membership that rarely exceeded 300, and was but 309, when, in 1908, it became incorporated with the Edmonton Society. But they were a happy band of co-operators; and of all the little societies that strove to cultivate the Co-operative Desert in the early years of the present century none contained such a compact body of idealists as that at Clapton Park. They had an educational committee, a propaganda council, a women's guild, and children's parties. Social gatherings kept the members imbued with the spirit of comradeship. There were no cinemas in those days, and "loud speakers" had no place in the furniture of the home. The members were in small houses, and places of amusement were expensive for the warehousemen and others who lived at Clapton Park. The Co-operative Social and Tea had a real place; it helped the attendance at the business meetings. At least 25 per cent of the members were always present at the "quarterlies." So they continued, encouraged by small dividends till, in 1908, they looked to the Edmonton Society, and linked up with that organisation on a basis of 20s. to the £.

Many of the societies that existed in London a quarter of a century ago knew little of each other. There were two groups of co-operative builders—one in Brixton and the other at Notting Hill. When the Stratford Society decided on a branch at Plaistow the committee were urged to give the contract to the co-operative builders with whom they had a little investment. Owing to the similarity of purpose of the two societies the letter went to the other one, and the Plaistow branch—designed by the distinguished architect Mr. Beresford Pite—was

erected by the society in which Stratford people had no capital. Of course, it did not really matter as both concerns were co-operative in their character. The recollection, however, is suggestive of the overlapping and sense of isolation which was a weakness of Metropolitan co-operative effort a generation ago.

There was a Co-operative Holiday Homes society, which was formed between the two jubilees of Queen Victoria, to give members of the East London societies a chance for inexpensive holidays. Earnest committeemen of the Tower Hamlets, Bethnal Green, and Hackney societies organised the effort, and took a house in the pine woods near Woking in Surrey. But they were inexperienced in housekeeping—and had no women to guide them in managing a home. The Holiday Home became a burden, and some of the committee found its liquidation the easiest task in its career.

Amid the multitude of co-operative societies formed to apply the principle of sharing the economies of mutual trading with the customers, there have been a few variations such as the Socialist bakeries at Canning Town, St. Pancras, and Bermondsey. The most notable experiment arose from the activities of the Brotherhood Association which Mr. J. Bruce Wallace initiated in 1899. It had its location in Stoke Newington. Advocating the solution of social ills by the elimination of profit in the purchase of necessities, it had as basis :—

- (1) the store, (2) federated commercial houses willing to supply members on favourable terms, (3) a Labour Exchange, and (4) an Exchange Circle by barter notes and cheques.

After eight years of propaganda its principles were put to a test in the registration of the Co-operative Brotherhood Trust, Ltd., in April, 1897. It set out zealously to establish "a new social order," and to hasten the coming of the Co-operative Commonwealth. But it had to seek refuge in the system of co-operation, as developed by the neighbouring societies, and ultimately entered the fold of the L.C.S.



# CO-OPERATIVE CAMPERS AT THE L.C.S. FARM AT ONGAR.

1. Lunch Time  
4. Morning Bath

2. Arrival of the Campers at Ongar Station  
5. The L C S. Farm with Labourers Cottages

3. Tea Time  
6. A Happy Group.



### THE POLITICAL COMMITTEE OF THE L.C.S.

*Back Row* Mr D. Chater, Mrs N. C. Shumman, Mr F. W. Carter, Mrs A. M. Wilson, Mr W. E. Montague  
*Front Row* Mr E. W. Barnes, Mr D. W. Hall, Mrs E. Hodge, Mr A. W. Graham (Chairman), Mrs A. Jarett (Vice  
 Chairman), Mr C. E. Rabbitt, Mr W. B. Horn  
 Messrs R. C. Morrison, M.P., G. Ellis, G. J. Workman and Mrs M. Brown were absent when the photograph was taken



## CHAPTER X.

### HOUSE OWNERSHIP.

CO-OPERATION means more than the feeding of the families and the furnishing of their homes. The first thoughts of the pioneers of the Co-operative and Economical Society of 1821 were the provision of housing accommodation on communal lines. It was an audacious hazard of neighbourliness for a people accustomed to live in the separate privacy of single houses—and even in the scant comfort of single rooms. The idea stretched forth into shopkeeping half-a-dozen years later, as already shown. It occurred again, in a modified, and modernised, form in 1883, when Mr. Benjamin Jones—whose services at the London branch of the C.W.S. included the business oversight of many of the societies that managed to live from the final years of the last century to the first years of the present—suggested the co-operative ownership of houses on lines that were becoming familiar in connection with shopkeeping. Henry Broadhurst's help enabled Mr. Jones to bring the matter before the London Trades Council, at a meeting at the Memorial Hall, in 1884.

For two years Mr. Jones persevered with his notion, and in November, 1887, at a meeting at the C.W.S. branch in Leman Street, a provisional committee was formed, which promptly registered a society—The Tenant Co-operators' Ltd. This purchased six houses at Upton. In 1889 they built 24 others on a site acquired at Penge; another 24 cottages and "maisonettes" were erected in the same locality in 1893. Fourteen residential flats were put up in Camberwell in 1893; 32 dwellings provided in East Ham in 1896; and the development of a site at Epsom four years later proved the last piece of construction. Altogether the Tenant

Co-operators' Ltd. has provided accommodation for 122 families.

Following this demonstration of the value of co-operation in inducing the interest of tenants in the houses they occupy came the Garden City inspiration of Mr. (now Sir) Ebenezer Howard, in his book of 1898, *To-morrow*, which materialised in Letchworth, and has had much to do with the change from the long rows of houses, all alike, to the new estates where gardens and longer vistas give a fresh pleasure to the homeland. Distinct from the Garden City idea is the Garden Suburb movement, which commenced the making of the Brentham Garden Suburb at Ealing in 1901. This has now 2,000 inhabitants, who enjoy shopping from a branch of the L.C.S. Similarly at Golders Green the London Co-operative Society has shopping representation on the Hampstead Garden Suburb, which owes its origin and its extent to Dame H. O. Barnett. It is a long way from the old days of St. Jude's Church and Toynbee Hall when she and the Rev. S. A. Barnett gave the co-operators of London an educational enthusiasm which, among other notable things, brought Dr. Albert Mansbridge from his stool in the C.W.S. offices in the continuing street and eventually led to the formation of the Workers' Education Association.

To assist its members to become the owners of the houses they occupy the L.C.S. has a Building Department which advances money on mortgage along liberal lines. Its advice is freely given to intending purchasers of houses, and altogether £330,000 has been lent to members. Mr. G. L. Banks, the secretary of the London society, has specialised on questions associated with the problems of owner-occupiers. His acquaintance with the legal aspects of such questions gives the members a confidence in the operations of the Department. For the big developments of the L.C.S. during the last three years have made its secretary an authority in dealing with property—whether for extensive business expansion or for intensive home comfort.

## CHAPTER XI.

### THE L.C.S. CENTRE.

THE registered office of the London Co-operative Society is at 54, Maryland Street, Stratford, E. This is in succession to the headquarters of the Stratford Society, and gives distinction to the county borough of West Ham. Since 1861 Stratford provided the most notable example of co-operation in the area in which the L.C.S. now operates. It is fitting, therefore, that we should consider the character of the district before scanning the course of the three societies—West London, Edmonton, and Stratford—that make up the amalgamation.

#### A GLANCE AT STRATFORD.

Before the Railway Invasion the district was one of market gardens and coaching hostelrys. In the villages beyond the people grew corn and fed cattle. Its history was mainly of a rural aspect. For Stratford's congested condition is of modern growth; in fact, it was not always Stratford. In the Domesday Book the country of present-day Stratford to Barking was set out as Hamme—that being the name of the village in Saxon times. The records are silent as to its doings until the twelfth century when the first Bow Bridge was erected by Matilda, wife of Henry I., because "the forde (now Old Ford) over the river Lue" was dangerous. That bridge held till 1839 when the growing traffic compelled the construction of a new one. Contemporary with the building of the first bridge was the foundation of the Cistercian Abbey of Stratford Langthorne on the Essex side of the river. Stratford-atte-Bowe developed as a village on the Middlesex bank, and became famous for its schools,

Chaucer giving its linguistic accomplishment mention in his *Canterbury Tales*. Stratford Langthorne eventually became distinguished as Ham Stratford, and, some centuries later, as West Ham, with East Ham nestling closely to its eastern borders. During the Middle Ages the gentry erected great houses in the place, which was conveniently situated midway between the gaiety of the Court, and the pleasures of the chase in Epping Forest.

A Royal Charter for a market was granted to Stratford in 1253, and, a hundred years later, cattle were prohibited journeying nearer London than Stratford. The animals were slaughtered in the village, and conveyed to Butchers' Row at Whitechapel, for sale to the citizens of London. There were a number of flour mills in the locality, and from the thirteenth to the fifteenth century, the baking of bread for the people in London, five or six miles away, was the "big business" of the place. From the bakeries of Stratford the loaves were taken in long carts and sold from the appointed stations in Cornhill, Cheapside, and Gracechurch Street.

In his *Vision of Piers Plowman* William Langland wrote, in 1362, of the misery of the great city, "when no carte came to town with bred from Stretforth," and early in the sixteenth century some of the bakers of Stratford were soundly beaten by the citizens of London who resented the scarcity of bread, and the high prices for the small quantity obtainable. Through the next century the surrounding villages became the abodes of wealthy folk, and Wanstead House attracted Royal visitors to what Arthur Young described as "one of the noblest mansions in England"; just as Plaistow, with its Essex House, had a distinguished visitors' list. The rural aspect of Stratford continued through the 18th century; droves of geese from beyond Romford were frequently seen on their way to London. Dick Turpin lived hereabouts when not "travelling"; John Wesley often came on horseback from his chapel in the City Road to preach in Stratford and the adjoin-

ing parishes ; Edmund Burke wandered in the pleasant lanes of West Ham when residing at Plaistow from 1759 to 1761, and in 1808 Elizabeth Fry, recognising the country air of Plashet Park, became identified with East Ham. Tom Hood lived at Lake House, Wanstead, and was frequently in Stratford to see his doctor who lived at the Vicarage Lane end of the Romford Road. From his home at Walthamstow William Morris wandered into Epping Forest ; even in his day the district was a rural one. That aspect had scarcely disappeared when Cardinal Wiseman made Etloe House, Church Road, Leyton, his country residence from 1858 to 1865 ; Tennyson, too, must have seen something of it when he stayed at High Beech and heard from Waltham Abbey, the bells that

Ring out old shapes of foul disease,  
Ring out the narrowing lust of gold ;  
Ring out the thousand wars of old,  
Ring in the thousand years of peace !

#### WHERE THE SEED WAS SOWN.

The development of the railway system was the first act in the transformation to urban conditions. The Eastern Counties Railway was incorporated in 1836 ; three years later its London terminus was at Shoreditch, and Colchester was at the other end of the line ; another company ran from Stratford towards Cambridge ; and other smaller lines were opened by various companies during the next few years. The works of the Eastern Counties Railway were established at Stratford, and artisans were attracted from the North of England. To house the immigrants, the company erected several streets of houses, and named the colony "Hudson's Town" in honour of the railway magnate of the period. In the autumn of 1862 all the various railway systems of the eastern counties were merged into the Great Eastern Railway Company.

Such was the ground in which the seeds of co-operation were sown in Stratford.

## CHAPTER XII.

# THE CO-OPERATIVE TRIO.

### THE START AT STRATFORD.

THERE were stirring times in and about London in the early Eighteen Sixties. The rustle of invasion was heard in military circles, and the Volunteer movement arose in preparation for a foreign visitor who never landed. But there were other alarms than those that involved the marshalling of men for rifle practice. The wives of the railway workmen found themselves at the mercy of the local flour dealers who advanced prices without the modern restraint imposed by a National Food Council guided by the equitable customs of co-operative societies.

In those days the housewives made the bread for the family. Many of them took the loaves to the bakehouse of the flour seller, where it obtained the necessary crustiness. That was the common practice in Stratford long after the village had thrown off its rusticity. The home production of bread was probably the last survival of the early customs of the district. It gave rise to the system of Co-operation in buying, baking, and selling in fulfilment of King Lear's anticipation of the time

When co-operation should undo excess  
And each man have enough.

Early in 1860 some of the railwaymen met and put their savings together to open a flour shop in the Leyton Road. They lost their money, put up the shutters, and retired from business in a few weeks.

During the summer the prices of flour rose to such a point that the determination of the fallen co-operators to try again was aroused. They talked about it in

the workshops; they called on their neighbours. When writing the History of the Society in 1904, I spent some time with a couple of co-operators, T. Coleman and G. Brock, who were present at the meeting. Their recollections, and some contemporaneous records, enable us to visualise the start of the Stratford Society—as humble and as quaint as the beginning of any Lancashire or Yorkshire society of similar date. The meeting was held in a coffee house in the Broadway, Stratford. It was kept by Simeon Easy; certainly it did not keep him. For Simeon toiled his full day at the railway works, while his wife attended to the customers, mostly carters and wagoners returning from the London markets to their market gardens in Essex. In the evening Mr. and Mrs. Easy helped each other, and served hot coffee with pleasant conversation.

#### THE MEETING OF THE PIONEERS.

In the upper room of that humble house of innocuous entertainment a dozen men met to enrol themselves in a voluntary movement for the peaceful penetration of business with the principle of mutual trading. Others might become volunteers in a citizen army; but they joined a battalion of self-help. \* My old friends, Coleman and Brock, recalled the presence of two brothers, Stephens, John Parsons (who in later years was secretary), and a couple of local celebrities, "The Cider Man" and "Tinker Ford." Simeon Easy was also in the room, although, with husbandly kindness, he frequently went below to assist his good lady when customers became clamorous. The oratory rose to great flights when "The Cider Man" held forth. He had a big voice, which had constant exercise in calling attention to the beverage he sold at the gates of the railway works when the men were leaving, and which he hawked from door to door when wives were busy and the air was sultry. "Tinker Ford" was a quiet fellow. His place in life was indicated by his sobriquet.

The blustering manners of "The Cider Man" nearly upset the venture. After some of those present at "Easy's Temperance Coffee House"—to quote the official title given in the first printed rules of the Stratford Co-operative Society—had urged the benefits of Co-operation to the many, "The Cider Man" began to indicate its advantages to the few. He described a plan by which the founders of the society should share the kernel of the profits, leaving only the husks to the ordinary members. Then he grew wild in invective, declared he would have his own way, and ultimately the meeting broke up in confusion. Thus ended the first concerted effort for the establishment of the society.

Disappointment, but not despair was the feeling of the true Co-operators. They decided to have another try. This time the attendance was limited to men employed at the railway works; they met early in the winter in goodly numbers. Within a few weeks they drew up the rules and defined the object as being

to raise, by the voluntary subscriptions of the members, a fund for better enabling them to purchase food, firing, clothes, and other necessities, by carrying on in common the trade or business of general dealers.

Those first rules determined Wednesday as the night of the committee meeting—a day that has been observed for over sixty years without thought of change—and, having been signed by Simeon Easy, John Taylor and David Legg, with George Brimer as secretary, were registered on January 22nd., 1861. On February 23rd, the little shop at the corner of Falmouth Street and Maryland Street—recently demolished for the erection of a furnishing showroom—was rented for the co-operative society. The shutters remained up all the week, and were taken down on Friday and Saturday evenings, when the committee went behind the counter and served the members. Office was no sinecure. For the committee were the buyers of the stocks as well as the sellers of the goods. After the day's work, Monday



and Tuesday evenings were occupied in weighing and making up parcels. On Wednesday, the Council of Administration met in the little back kitchen. Thursday was an "off" day; at the end of the week the committee had to share "the common round," and, with sleeves tucked up, take their turn at the counter. There were nearly a hundred members at the beginning, and, so keen was the interest, the second half-yearly meeting had to be held at the Castle Inn—Easy's Coffee House being too small to accommodate the 114 members.

#### MARYLAND STREET.

Other traders grew apprehensive as to the probable success of the little shop run by amateur shopmen as a recreation, or a hobby. Within a few weeks, by selling flour at a fair price, the co-operative society compelled other dealers to reduce their price 2d. a peck. At the end of 1862, the society engaged a shopman; three years later it was decided to purchase a plot of land "at the west end of Maryland Street, on the south side, with a double frontage, 75ft. on one side and 99ft. on the other." It cost £300, and provided the corner stone for the substantial premises that now extend themselves along both Store Street and Maryland Street. The site of the head office of the L.C.S. has thus been in co-operative ownership over sixty years.

The pioneers of the Stratford Society never contemplated that the plot of land would ever be in the possession of a London Co-operative Society. For several years the membership was exclusively made up of railwaymen; then others were admitted, cautiously and carefully. As late as 1884 the entrance fee of a lady who wanted to join was returned, her "husband being a member and it being against the custom to have two members of one family." On many occasions the balance sheets were delivered by the children of the committee to save expense; in 1876 the office work had grown to such an extent that the committee

resolved "That the secretary be authorised to buy some gum, a pot and a brush," and also "that we have a medium quality copying press with wrought iron beam and an oak stand." This served a dozen years and was then sold for half-a-crown, the official minute as to the disposal recording "That it is of no further use to the society." Originally the members' trade was set down in books provided for the customers; metal checks were introduced in 1864 and continued till 1895, when they were superseded by the "Climax" system of recording purchases.

For ten years the society had no delivery system; members were enjoined to provide themselves with "baskets for their goods, and bags for their flour." In 1872 the first hand truck was bought; in the following year a bakery was built. This necessitated the acquisition of a horse. By 1876 the society had three or four, and for several weeks the committee gravely considered equine points. One of the animals bit the secretary and it was unanimously resolved, in committee, "That a muzzle be purchased forthwith for the horse showing such a vicious temper." The committee took a personal interest in the animals; they gave them distinctive names, and went carefully into the dietary, for at one meeting they resolved:—

That we give the horse "Iron" quarter peck oats per day less and half peck bran in lieu of it; and that the horse "Ben" have half peck bran in addition to his daily fare.

The early committeemen had much to do in the way of administration. When the sugar prices were greatly fluctuating in 1877 it was resolved that

the purchasing of sugar, while markets are in their unsettled state, be left in the hands of the chairman.

"to speak to Miss —— as to dressing her hair in a becoming manner."

#### THE MINUTIÆ OF BUSINESS.

I have mentioned these minutiæ to suggest to the new generation of co-operators the serious responsibilities, and the serious way in which they accepted the responsibilities, of those elected to manage the Stratford Society in the first twenty years. The organisation of the store was a great undertaking; it was continuously successful, always paying a dividend ranging from 1s. to 2s. 6d. There has been a succession of officers whose integrity and grasp of detail has left a great legacy. The old minute books are a revelation of earnest endeavour. What has been written of Stratford has occurred in the history of all the societies enumerated in this volume. The thousands of men and women throughout the century who have sacrificed their leisure and, often, risked their livelihoods for the sake of Co-operation has given us what the poet Whittier called a "steady faith in man." For even when the quarterly meeting grew boisterous and a policeman was engaged to keep order a proper reckoning was made. In the next balance sheet appeared the entry "Chairs broken at meeting, £7."

#### STRATFORD'S LATER YEARS.

Not till the last decade of the century did the Stratford Society stretch itself, although it had taken over the Canning Town Society a few years before. Under the presidency of Mr. A. W. Golightly it expanded and deepened. As the chairman of the executive council of the A.S.E. (now the A.E.U.) he brought a vigorous trade union influence, and with sagacious judgment persuaded the members to a quickening of co-operative associations. Mr. G. L. Banks, who had entered the society's office as a lad, became secretary in 1895, and has grown with the institution. As manager, Mr. W. H. Elliott exercised a business super-

vision of the increasing branches and departments which helped the expansion.

In fairly quick succession other societies were taken over, including Beckton, Barking, Brentwood, Walthamstow, and Southend. Until 1895 progress had been steady. There were then only 5,780 members with a share capital of £61,299. By 1903 these had increased to 12,914, the capital had trebled, and the sales more than doubled to £315,004. The hearty association of the general and the education committees in propaganda work raised the membership to 22,988 in the jubilee year, 1911. Mr. Golightly's election to the directorate of the Co-operative Wholesale Society, a few years later, opened the way for the accession of Mr. Alfred Barnes, who thus had the distinction of being the last president of the Stratford Society, the previous holders of the office having been his immediate predecessor, Aitken Brown, J. Verguson, J. Horn, William Peckett, Stephen Smith, and Wm. Jenkins. When the Stratford Society joined forces with Edmonston it had nearly 60,000 members. It was 34 years in getting the first 6,000, so that its growth in the subsequent quarter of a century proved that the tide of co-operation was rising with greater volume than when it had circumscribed its sphere of influence.

#### WEST LONDON'S OUTPOSTS.

Co-operation in West London came out of the "underground." The West London Co-operative Society that flourished for a generation in Dawes Road, Fulham, was started by members of the West Brompton branch of the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants (now the N.U.R.). Mr. George Coffin was secretary all the time; he preserves his association with his old co-operative work as Branch office supervisor of the L.C.S. The Rev. P. S. G. Propert, M.A., who had founded the church of St. Augustine's, Fulham, quickly recognised in the development of co-operation in business, the spirit of practical Christianity. The railwaymen

elected him as president of their co-operative society—a position which he held continuously until the society became merged in the larger hope—the London Co-operative Society.

Throughout its progressive course the president had steered the society with rare organising skill attuned to the spirit of co-operation. As Rural Dean of Fulham, he gave it an association with many other good causes, and the welcome given him at the annual fêtes held in the grounds of the Bishop of London, at Fulham Palace, was a recognition of his comradeship. Relinquishing his leadership in the West London Society, at the close of its separate existence, he has devoted himself to the interests of Poor Law administration, and as president of the Association of Poor Law Unions (which comprises 600 out of the 625 Poor Law authorities throughout the country) continues his self-denying labours for the people. As a co-operator, he is in the succession of the Rev. F. D. Maurice, Charles Kingsley, Bishop Creighton, Canon Barnett, and others who have recognised that co-operation embodies the Pauline philosophy, "We are members one of another."

The West London Society was registered early in May, 1893, but did not open its first shop till February, 1895. Its founders were the pioneers of an industrial movement in an uncongenial atmosphere. For they were operating in a suburban residential area where social distinction barred the way to the frank neighbourliness that helped the growth of the movement in the working-class district. But they had enthusiasm, and the society spread itself over a wide territory which included Belgravia and Richmond as well as Westminster and Wandsworth. In 1900 it opened central stores in Fulham, and for fifteen years after advanced so well that it was able to take over several less prosperous concerns. It incorporated the Harrow Road and Queen's Park Society in 1902; the Southall Society in 1904; the South-Western Society, at Mortlake, in 1911; the Richmond Agricultural Society in

1915. These new branches were far from the central, and tribute must be paid to the West London co-operators for their fine helping spirit in the development of which they almost over-reached themselves, when the years of stress came after the Armistice.

Just before West London began, Chelsea, Wimbledon, West Kingston, and High Street, Kensington societies closed down, and but for the railwaymen of West Brompton, co-operation might have faded out of the West End for another decade. The men on the line had been responsible for the formation of the Wimbledon and West Kensington societies which had collided on the tracks of a competitive system, against which they struggled with too small resources.

The last report of the West London Society showed it had a membership of 16,938. For the first time in its history, it had a loss in the trading account due to inability to decrease its expenses without injustice to older employees. The average sales were £5,688, whereas a turnover of £8,000 was necessary to meet all expenses and depreciation. The expenses were 17·83 per cent, and of that distributive wages accounted for 12·18. But on the eve of its transfer, the West London Society did a co-operative action in taking over the Kingston Society, and completing the Parson's Green warehouse and bakery, which are now two important assets of the L.C.S., and the centre of operations in the district.

#### EDMONTON'S VIGOROUS CAREER.

The Edmonton Society began in a modest way in 1888. Some local tramwaymen had heard about co-operation, and they met in the house of one of their number, J. Parlett, at 3, Church Street, to discuss the procedure involved. They had little actual knowledge, so they decided to get into touch with the Guild of Co-operators. The front parlour of a private house was too small for the eager fellows who wanted to start shopkeeping on their own account. The adjourned

- meeting was held at the Golden Lion Hotel, when 75 people present elected a provisional committee, which got to work on September 19th, and elected E. C. Cotterill as the secretary. The Edmonton Society was registered on October 13th, 1888 with sixty members, No. 1 being James Whitehead, whose leadership was a great factor in the subsequent success.

Glancing through the minutes and records of the early years the same zealous service detailed in the sketch of Stratford is evident. Early in 1889 a truck of coal was ordered, and a stable rented at 2s. 6d. per week for its storage pending sale. In June premises were opened at 5 Railway Approach, Lower Edmonton, and the new secretary, C. H. Taylor, was in communication with the societies at Clerkenwell, Stratford, and Woolwich as to business. But the road was not easy, and at the end of the year there was a loss. Thereupon, the committee deeming it "advisable in the interest of the society to declare a dividend," transferred their individual share holdings to the society for the benefit of the members—a piece of real sacrifice that shows the earnest character of the enthusiasts who founded the Edmonton Society. That decided the fortunes of the enterprise. By the end of 1890 a dividend of 1s. 8d. was earned. It was resolved to devote 2½ per cent to educational work so that these North London co-operators, starting 27 years after their eastern neighbours, organised their educational work five years before the Stratford Society recognised its necessity. Edmonton had the newer knowledge and the wider outlook.

The years following the election of G. Beavis as secretary in 1891, were times of expansion. A bakery was opened at Tottenham, and the members' meetings proved encouraging and exhilarating. In 1892 Mr. J. Maton, the present president of the L.C.S., was elected to the committee, and five years later to the chairmanship, which he resigned in 1909, owing to

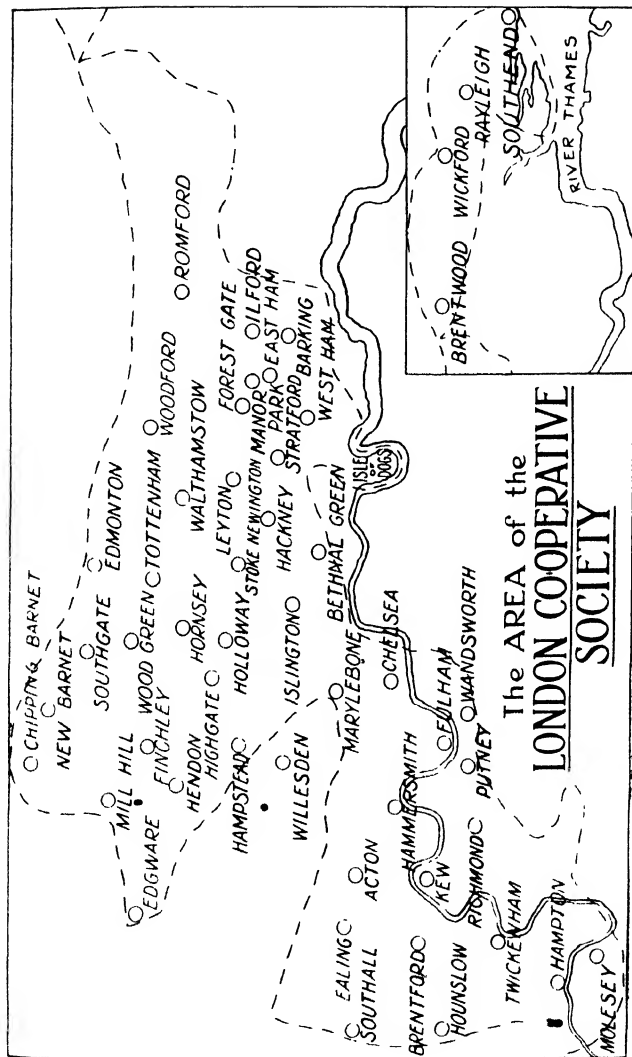
business reasons. At the end of 1910 he was again on the committee, and succeeded James Whitehead as president in 1911, holding that position till the amalgamation with Stratford in 1920, his subsequent co-operative career being recorded in the chapters that follow.

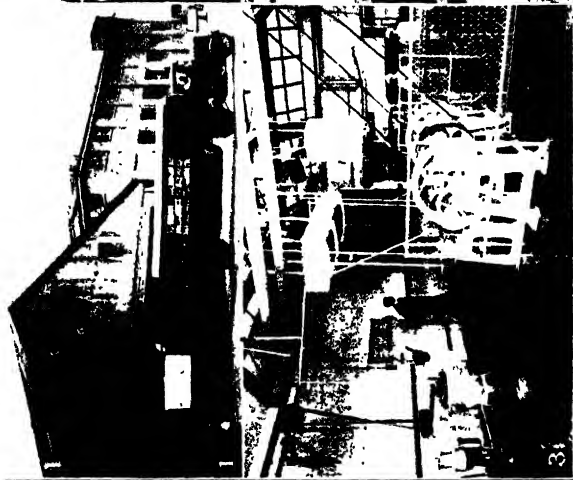
Removing to Shrubby House in the main Fore Street in 1896, the society of 800 members discovered that it had involved itself in a great undertaking. Then Mr. Newton E. Smith was appointed as manager, and the right direction was taken. In 1898 the secretaryship was combined with the management, and the membership soon advanced to four figures. A branch was opened in Tottenham, land bought at Silver Street, and boundaries established with neighbouring societies to prevent overlapping.

In 1905 the society adopted "Edco" as a trade mark, and its vans bearing that contracted form of Edmonton Co-operative appeared in the City of London—an invasion that amused the commercial magnates who regarded co-operation as too simple a virtue for their customers to accept. But they did. Appeals for branches reached the committee from Stoke Newington, Highbury, Kingland, Dalston, Hackney, Hornsey, and elsewhere. The Holloway Society was incorporated into that of "Edco"; the amalgamation with Wood Green brought to it another 1,776 members in 1908. Then Clapton Park Society joined in with 307, and by the end of the year it had a membership of 7,860. In twenty years it had obtained as many adherents as the Stratford Society secured in forty—a difference due to the Edmonton policy of developing in the new residential areas from the beginning. When it amalgamated with Stratford its membership was well over 35,000, so that it made good contribution to the new force that arose in London when the L.C.S. came into being.

✱ great wave of co-operative enthusiasm arose in





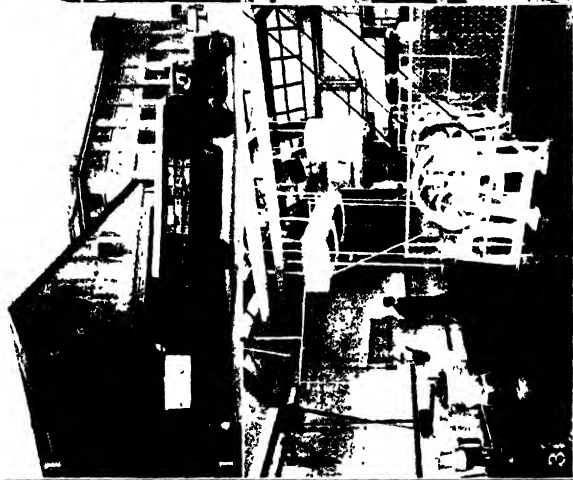


1 Sterilised Milk Depot, Palmer & Green  
3 Sterilising Milk at the Manor Park Dairy



### SOME OF THE DAIRY WORK OF THE L.C.S.

2 How the London Society brings Milk to Town  
4 Bottling at Manor Park



the early Eighteen Nineties. The C.W.S. opened several Continental depôts and then discovered the weakness of the retail movement in the Capital City of its own country. It induced the co-operators of the North to sanction the expenditure of £3,000 in floating the People's Co-operative Society Ltd. in the Metropolis. That was in the spring of 1894. In 1895 the society took over the London Co-operative Baking Society and opened grocery shops in various places. By August, 1897, it had secured 3,387 members, many of whom seceded when the dividend fell from 1s. to 9d.; 1898 saw the sales slump to £5,355. The return to purchasers dropped to 6d. The control and direction were organised from the central office, which was responsible for the stocks and management of the shops. The members, at the different branches, elected local committees of an advisory character. Their duties were merely nominal and their interest rapidly languished. Then in August, 1899, the People's Society went into voluntary liquidation. The central committee vainly expected that the local people would take the branches over as separate societies. Four societies were thus formed.

Only Willesden Green came through the ordeal. The others succumbed. The experiment was doomed to disaster from the beginning. It sought to plant stores in areas that did not call for self-governing shops. The movement succeeded subsequently in London because it was wanted by the people themselves. The stores at Stratford, Edmonton, Fulham and a dozen other places were inspired by consumers anxious to secure certain definite advantages and to develop the social instinct by mutual trading. They grew as their purpose became apparent to their neighbours. Their branches were established in response to petitions and requests from the housewives anxious to share the benefits. Thus the circle of co-operation has expanded throughout the Metropolitan area.

## CHAPTER XIII.

# THE DAWN OF LONDON'S N.E.W. UNITY.

Co-OPERATION comprises the production and the distribution of goods. It concerns the producer and the consumer. The society that bakes 600,000 half-quartern loaves of bread a week is the consumers' organisation; such production makes it an important manufacturing concern. The L.C.S. employs 6,500 people: 2,000 are engaged in making things—repairing boots, building shops, painting branches, cleaning linen, cultivating the farm, and generally adding to the resources of the society. Truly the producer as well as the distributor has a claim to co-operative recognition.

Man is not wholly a consuming animal; he must produce in order to live happily and healthily in a world where more ladies than Mrs. Grundy insist on certain conventions, or simplicities, in the way of raiment. These general divisions invariably overlap. The efforts to bisect mankind into consumers and producers are as tantalising as solving the problem as to which came first—the chicken or the egg? Happily the London Co-operative Society has avoided academic and doctrinaire niceties by upholding Co-operation as a comprehensive plan of modern living and working. It stands foursquare to all the æephyrs of theorists as well as the squalls of competitive storms. The L.C.S. makes bread and sells it. In estimating the remuneration of the baker and the price to the consumer it seeks equity to both. Such a comity of interests is secured in the co-operative organisation which responds to Browning's cry:

“ Make no more giants God,  
But elevate the race at once.”

The "race" comprises the teams of producers and consumers who make up the millions that live in the Metropolis, and beyond.

Such a fact has been reached by experience. In the middle of the last century London co-operators thought they could secure a tranquil industrialism by forming self-governing workshops in which the workers would settle their own conditions and wages, and the managers would add a profit which could be divided among the workers. But the consumers were to pay the cost thus determined, plus the expenses of distribution and, in the case of ordinary commercial concerns, the increased ratio of remuneration that the investor required. Based on this foundation the Christian Socialists organised groups of London workmen who were unfamiliar with business ways, and quickly fell into a financial morass. The experimental stage was more than 20 years before the Elementary Education Act of 1870, when knowledge was first nationally recognised as the right of every boy and girl. Then came the era of storekeeping—mainly in the towns of settled industries where the workers in mills, mines, and factories had a mutual confidence which gave stability to their efforts among themselves. In the centres of population like London and Liverpool the migratory habits of the people, and the casual labour of thousands of them, frustrated the cohesive quality that gave form and substance to the co-operative societies of the textile towns. Hence the fitful nature of co-operation, with its ups and downs, as recorded in a preceding chapter.

Twenty years after the passing of the Education Act of 1870, when the new generation was able to read and write, kindly disposed persons helped many distributive societies into a fair security; the University Club Society in Bethnal Green had the sympathy of the Oxford House Settlement. The present Archbishop of York, the Bishops of London and of Durham, the Hon. and Rev. J. G. Adderley associated with their

neighbours as co-operators. In West London the Rev. P. S. G. Propert, M.A., now the Rural Dean of Fulham, became president of the local society, and for more than 20 years steered its course. But the co-operative movement of London has won its broadening way from the confidence and fidelity of its members. The members have found their mission by reasoning among themselves and hammering out their problems—with only faith and experience to guide them.

The co-operators of the industrial North had succeeded in co-operation by their environment; they described London as "the co-operative desert," a great waste land where mutuality in trade was a will o' the wisp.

Understanding little of the nature of the problem some provincial co-operators thought they could impose co-operation upon a people unprepared for such a discipline of life. Money was voted by the Co-operative Wholesale Society for the founding of the People's Society, and a dozen shops were opened in as many Metropolitan boroughs and urban districts. Londoners warned the directors of the failure they were courting. The People's Society was doomed from the start; in three years only one branch was left as a witness of the venture. That was at Willesden where, as the North-West London Society, it has existed till, at the time these lines are written, negotiations are nearly completed for its incorporation into the London Society. Thus ends the last of the individual local societies in North, East, and West London.

Wherever co-operation had triumphed for any time in London it had been focussed among a group of people of like occupations or similar aspirations. The Battersea Society was centred in a candle works; West London and North-West London were sustained by the incursion of railwaymen who had known co-operation in other railway places; the University Club Society lingered under the ægis of social reformers who made neighbourliness a mission; Edmonton prospered because trade

unionists saw it was part of their economic creed, and in Stratford the movement was hatched in the railway works by workmen who, for a generation, watched its growth with jealous feelings towards those who came near their brood of mutual advantage. Only under such conditions did the London societies make headway during the early years of the present century.

During the Great War new economic forces developed and, emboldened by their raids upon the "Control" organisation of the Government, big financiers combined, arranged, and organised their concerns to eliminate competition and secure further advantage for the investor. The people of London and the British public were exploited all the day—from breakfast to supper. Then came the time when men were called to the Army, and home transport facilities were so reduced that to restrain the soaring cost of bread the co-operative societies of Stratford, Edmonton, and West London opened small bread shops in some of the congested areas. From these the customers carried their daily supplies—and the loaves were retailed at a halfpenny less than those delivered at the houses of the members. It was a way of amelioration; but only a palliative. Londoners suffered from the closing down of many of the little shops of individual tradesmen who had given personal service to their neighbours, but who were being ousted by the big companies. In the main thoroughfares, grocery and provision shops grew in size and pretentiousness, swollen by the capital supplied by investors and speculators. The rising suburb provided a rich harvest for the company promoter. Private retailers saw their livelihood threatened by the commercial octopus which strode through London without regard for the old-time tradesman or the consumer he served. The only protection for the latter were the simple, plain, and often old-fashioned co-operative stores. They were in out-of-the-way places. Many had been established in obscure neighbourhoods, removed from the main currents of traffic.

Their frontages had been unaltered for a generation. Directed by workmen-economists, who saw a burden of expense in fresh fittings, they preserved their original form and outline amid the emblazoned shop architecture that marked the advent of the company shop.

Tucked away in a back street at Maryland Point was the registered office of the largest of these co-operative societies. It began in what Charles Dickens first described as "London-over-the-border," crossed the river Lea, and invaded some of the boroughs of the old Tower Hamlets. Only the residents of Stratford and Leyton knew its actual location. In a dreary, dull corner of Canning Town was another co-operative shop; a drab and unfashionable store stood co-operative sentinel in Fulham, suffering from comparison with its brighter commercial neighbours. Away in North London and some of the districts stretching through dismal streets to the City were other co-operative shops, hidden near the homes of the people. The founders of all these societies—Stratford, West London, and Edmonton—had been men and women of co-operative faith; their successors had maintained the tradition with persevering zeal. They believed in the small shop situated in the parish where the people lived—and the people proudly carried the shopping bag or basket, earning a small but comforting dividend on purchases. But "the old order changeth yielding place to new," and the day of the little shop was passing. The consumer was likely to be dependent upon the fuller facilities offered by the organiser of the new Commercialism.

Bigger things were needed co-operatively. Several times efforts had been made to secure joint working among the London societies. In 1898 the Stratford representative on the Central Board proposed the formation of a Council of Metropolitan societies. This came into being, and did useful propaganda for a while. In 1906 Mr. Newton E. Smith, who had been the secretary of the Edmonton Society for eight years, was advocating the amalgamation of the dozen little



societies that tried to find a footing. His society endorsed this view by incorporating the Wood Green, Holloway, Clapton Park, and some others into its own. The Stratford Society had taken over societies at Canning Town, Beckton, Barking, Walthamstow, Brentwood, and Southend. Away on the other side the West London Society had absorbed the Queen's Park and Harrow Road, and the Richmond Society. On the south side of the Thames the Royal Arsenal was equally alert in promoting the welfare of the movement. But all these amalgamations were really the incorporation of weaker neighbours; the great issue was not fully faced till 1910.

The mobilisation of the Metropolitan co-operative forces really began in that year.

Meetings of the committees of the London societies dealt with matters of internal organisation, the source of the supply of stocks and similar problems of a business character. Such "conversations" made easier the collective action necessary two years later when negotiations between the management of the London societies and the Amalgamated Union of Operative Bakers and Confectioners were ratified by a Board of Trade agreement. That was the first official recognition of the co-operative movement in London as an entity. On June 13th, 1913, a meeting was held on the C.W.S. premises, Leman Street, when the committees of the following societies were represented:—

Bromley	Penge	West London
Croydon	Royal Arsenal	Willesden
Edmonton	Stratford	Yiewsley
Enfield Highway	Sutton	West Drayton

The association of the co-operative societies within the Metropolitan Police area was then formed under the title of The Joint Committee of London Co-operative Societies. Throughout the War the Joint Committee brought the whole weight of Metropolitan co-operation to bear in relation to questions of prices, food control, and other negotiations with Government departments,

as well as matters relating to employment. One of its happiest memories was the joint invitation to the Women's Co-operative Guild to hold its annual Congress in London in 1916. It was fortunate that there had been hearty co-operation among the societies—a co-operation that had to be won by argument, reason, patience and toleration. Mr. J. Dickinson (Royal Arsenal) was the first chairman of the Joint Committee, and later Mr. Newton E. Smith (Edmonton) became the secretary. He and Mr. Alfred Barnes (Stratford) examined the possibilities of amalgamation in papers which opened the direct way to the ultimate union. It was recognised that the consolidation of co-operative effort in London was the task before the leaders. Mr. Barnes stated the case as it presented itself in 1916, as follows :—\*

	Membership.		Sales. £		Capital. £
Woolwich (Royal Arsenal)	51,365 ...		1,386,473 ...		651,886
Stratford .....	40,278 ...		1,112,000 ...		464,994
Edmonton .....	26,035 ...		488,366 ...		119,836
West London .....	10,701 ...		166,972 ...		48,156
Enfield Highway ...	8,738 ...		271,480 ...		137,244
Bromley .....	8,000 ...		182,826 ...		58,127
Croydon.....	7,009 ...		118,836 ...		30,470
Willesden.....	4,014 ...		69,128 ...		13,508
Penge .....	3,375 ...		61,120 ...		20,306
Staines.....	2,406 ...		57,146 ...		14,035
Hendon .....	1,944 ...		27,272 ...		7,550
	163,866 ...		£3,941,619 ...		£1,566,112

\*Bromley, Croydon, and Penge have since amalgamated as the South Suburban Society; the Royal Arsenal continues its progressive strides on the south side; Enfield Highway prospers in the northern suburbs and Hertfordshire townships; Stratford, Edmonton, West London, Hendon form, with a few branches taken over from the Staines Society and the Willesden (North-West London Society) Society now coming in, the L.C.S.

Pleas for the fusion of the forces were advanced in the interests of administrative efficiency, advantageous buying, the pooling of expert management and salesmanship, the prevention of the leakage of members by removals, the centralisation of capital for the common purpose, the economical organisation of transport

and delivery, and the effective evolution of a comprehensive business, educational, civic, and political programme for London as a whole. Hitherto co-operation had mainly influenced the artisan and industrial classes. It had not got down to the poor, nor had it reached the suburban resident and the professional wage earners whose need of its benefits was as great as that of any other section.

With a collective appeal co-operation could become a potent factor in developing a higher educational and recreative employment of leisure. It could introduce conscience into commerce, and harmonise the industrial conditions of thousands of workers. There was a bold vision in the manner of presenting the idea. Its possibilities were endless. The difficulties in the way of realisation were puzzling, harassing and stubborn. Amalgamation was not an easy achievement. For the management and oversight of democratic trading associations induces strength of character and, often, an indomitable pride in the service for others. The members of the committees of the small societies were resolved to make great sacrifices of personal comfort and prospects for the cause. Hence the sturdy independence and reasoned opposition with which many of the co-operators met the proposals for amalgamation. They argued at meetings and renewed their efforts to bring their shopkeeping to success. Whilst the growth of the Big Brothers was regarded as the triumph of the principles for which they stood, these little store enthusiasts kept working for the strengthening of their own ventures with earnest zeal. It was the trial between the upholders of the two policies, viz., many small or one great society that maintained the co-operation in London amid the growing combinations of competing interests, and made the amalgamation inevitable in the ultimate end. The faith of its advocates triumphed.

## CHAPTER XIV.

# THE LONDON CO-OPERATIVE SOCIETY

The darkest hour is that before the dawn, and into the despondency caused by the crunching competitive system of shopkeeping that was grinding the family resources came the searchlight of the amalgamated, strengthened, and united London Co-operation that was clearing the way for the protection of the consumer. Just as the exploiters of the daily necessities of the people had found new gains by absorbing one another, so the co-operative forces discovered the value of harmonious association and unity. In 1920 the Stratford and the Edmonton societies were incorporated into the London Co-operative Society; in 1921 the West London Society joined in the co-operative trinity and settled down into the stride of London. That stemmed the ramp on the family exchequers. The comparatively small co-operative units coalesced into a great democratic trading organisation of Social Service and Civic Consciousness. Now there are a quarter-of-a-million members of this mighty self-governing body of consumers and producers. They have a mutual interest, and have realised a common regard for each other. They have sought their own social betterment; and in that act of economic salvation have conferred tangible benefits on all who live and work in London.

They have restrained the encroaching rapacity of the profit-loving retailers.

They have gained the goodwill and confidence of a million men, women, and children.

They have established a society whose finances are firmly founded, and whose ideals are above the sordid earth of commercial shopkeeping.

They have been recognised by the National Food Council as a potent influence in lessening the prices of milk, bread, and coal—and thus cheapening the cost of living.

They have earned the thanks of 250,000 housewives who recognise that their system of trading secures advantages in price, quality, and purity of supplies.

They have created a unified London by the provision of essential services on the same basis throughout the Northern, Eastern, and Western areas.

They have provided an educational impetus among the men and women throughout their sphere of influence.

They have organised the young men and women in guilds of recreative insight—bringing out the latent musical, artistic, and literary instincts of their members in association with one another.

They have created a great company of workers who recognise that the selling of necessities is a service of honour as well as the work for a livelihood.

They have brought conscience into commerce and brotherhood into business.

They have carried the co-operative spirit of mutual trust and the collective welfare into many a council chamber—even into the Legislature of the Nation.

THEREFORE these 250,000 adherents of the L.C.S. are members of no mean and meagre society. They constitute a State.

The chronicle of the London Co-operative Society since its inauguration is a reflex of the changing fortunes of humanity. It has not had an easy road; there have been the risks of side-slips, the chances of disaster. How they have been counteracted, and how the society has emerged during its seven years of strenuous life is related for the encouragement of contemporaries, and the information of the coming generations who will regard the L.C.S. as a great legacy, sweetening and brightening the atmosphere in which the people live.

#### WHEN THE DIVIDEND DISAPPEARED.

The amalgamated co-operative forces of Stratford and Edmonton got together at a time when the pseudo-prosperity of the war was waning into the nadir of deflation. During the last three months of 1920—the first quarter of the London Co-operative

answer to any reproaches that may be hurled against co-operators in times of prosperity. Month after month during 1921 and 1922, the sales tailed off, and the prices of commodities fell with resultant losses in the depreciation of stocks. Courage never failed; and the Dividend is not the ultimate goal of co-operative endeavour. It is a useful signpost to the land of Co-operative Comfort, and shows the way to economic independence.

Co-operators realised during the slump period that their policy of restraining, as far as they could, the soaring cost of living during the inflated years 1918 and 1919 was not working out so satisfactorily in face of the changed circumstances. They had adhered to the co-operative practice of not advancing the prices of commodities as long as they held stocks which had been bought at the "lower" rates. They did not take advantage of the opportunity to make ultimate gain out of the immediate necessities. The members had the advantage of securing lower prices on the rising market all through 1918 and 1919. Then, when the downward tendency developed and the markets came tumbling down, there was no fund from which to meet the fall. Many of the people who had been advantaged during those trying years forgot the boon they had received; and the Society collectively had to suffer the loss on the "return journey."

The London Society endured the dividendless stage—depreciating its property (save in one term), paying its expenses, and giving the shareholders their full rate of interest. For, it must be remembered, the dividends on purchases are supplementary to the interest on capital. The latter is secured beyond any manner of doubt, and right through the crucial year of 1921, and the trying period that followed, the financial stability of the society was never in question. Even the brokers and the jobbers haunting Throgmorton Street had to recognise that co-operative shares were always worth

20s. in the £. They gave sound security without the hazard of a gamble.

It was during the lean year that the Stamp Club system of trading grew in volume and value. The society's membership rose to 112,679 at the end of 1921. The expansion to a six-figure total was secured by the transfer of 16,938 members from the West London Society, and of 922 from some of the branches of the Staines Society. Thus while the London Society was seeking a way out of its own difficulties it helped others whose troubles were greater.

#### THE INTERTWINING OF WEST AND EAST.

Some day the West will recognise the co-operative impetus it has secured from the older forces of the East and the North. The rate of co-operative advance now proceeding in the western suburbs is a splendid recognition of the co-operative threads which form a great cable of comfort to the families at both ends of London—the West and the East. In a poem written in 1889, Kipling declared that "East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet," well, since then the facts have been disclosed against him—so far as co-operation in London is concerned.

Happily the co-operative movement has no frontiers. All who join the London Co-operative Society become members of a union in which the interests are mutual. The clamour of competition is transformed into a rivalry for the better expression of citizenship, the more gracious featuring of our leisure and social life, and the kindlier distribution of the necessities of daily existence. So the matter of geographical boundaries is of little moment in a Society that has unified the Metropolitan boroughs with the City area and the outer circle into a corporate and co-operative whole.

The separate interests of metropolitan divisions of London have baffled political reformers for a hundred years; the London Co-operative Society has brought

unity in relation to the food supplies of the people. It is now carrying the same principle of association into the educational, musical, recreative, civic and political arena. Verily it is preparing the Capital of the Empire for the coming of the Co-operative Commonwealth foreshadowed by Tennyson.

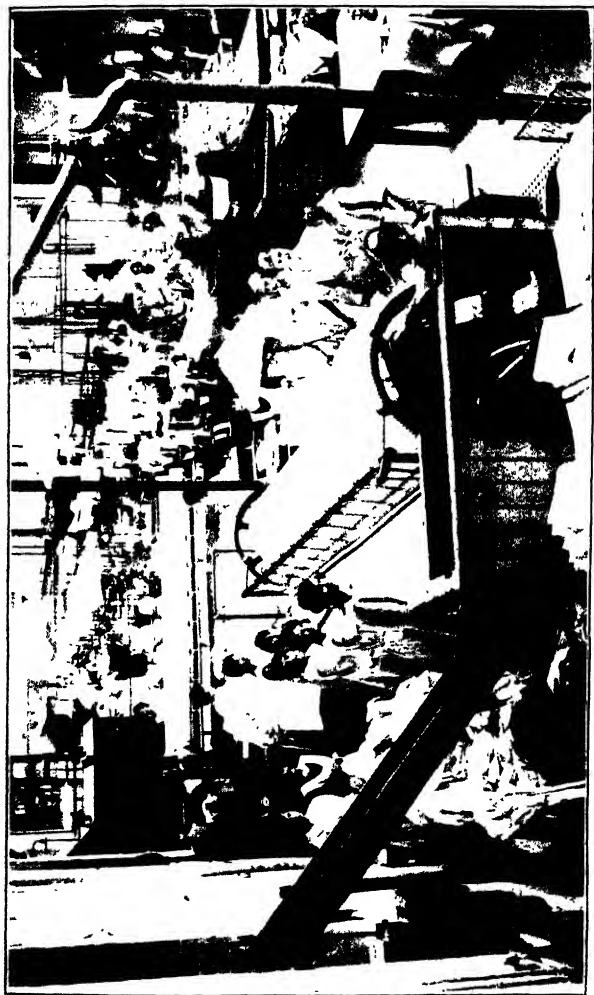
When all the schemes and all the systems, Kingdoms, and  
 Republics fall,  
 Something kindlier, higher, holier—all for each, and each  
 for all.

The spring of 1922 saw a dwindling in the selling prices of commodities. Although the sales for the half year that ended in March were over a million and a half, they were a decline of 30 per cent on the corresponding period of 1920-21. The committee wrote off £60,000 during the six months to reduce the stocks of drapery, clothing, and furniture to the current market prices. It was in keeping with the abnormal economic pressure in the trail of the War. The signing of the Armistice was followed by an artificial prosperity—a patulous period in which wealth accumulated on rich foundations, while an imaginary fairyland coloured, without satisfying, the workers' outlook. The share books of the society were an index of the strain on many of the members when the War Bubble was pricked; and we came down heavily to a realisation of the commercial pretence that, instead of keeping "the home fires burning," left cold comfort on the hearth.

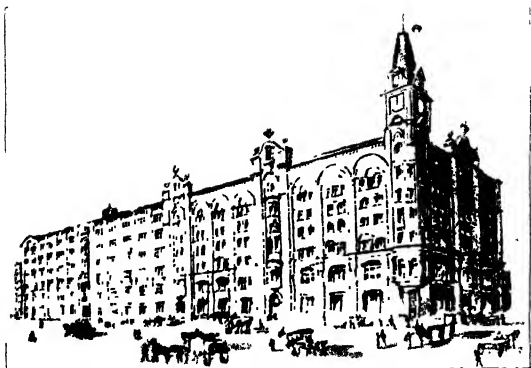
#### MR. ALFRED BARNES SEES IT THROUGH.

This writing-down of stocks was really an assurance of safety; the temporary suspension of the depreciation on land, buildings, and fixtures was a further precautionary measure. Mr. A. Barnes, the president, and his colleagues on the committee, surveyed the society from Southend to Southall and from Palmer's Green to Poplar. They determined to safeguard the future; and the members—112,000 heads of families—recognising the experience as an exercise in political economy





A view in the original laundry of the L.C.S. at Leytonstone. The Society has another laundry at Acton, for the convenience of the West



The C.W.S. premises in Leaman Street, F 1

The turnover of the London Branch of the Co-operative Wholesale Society was well over £26,000,000 in 1927, towards which the L.C.S. did its share



Impressing the natural growth of the L.C.S. on the people of London

or sagacity gave them their confidence. It was a time of test; and they endured.

No phase of development was stopped during the period of deflated values and the absence of a dividend on purchases. Several new branches and fresh food departments were opened; a biscuit factory was established at Southend, early in 1922, from which to supply the grocery shops of the society and to maintain a productive enterprise for the employment of some of the members. It was a characteristic enterprise of the widening view of co-operation. In its development the London Society has swept away the local and parochial idea. It has legislated for the Metropolis as a whole—or rather the North, East, and West—and now commands the admiration of the national movement. For it has experienced the chastening of industrial and commercial depression, gaining knowledge and wisdom in the process. The early Victorian co-operators had to encounter the risks of forming societies without legal protection; the pioneers of co-operation struggled without experience against the migratory nature of the Londoners of their day; but the committee of the London Co-operative Society had to face obstacles and encounter the storms of a mad competitive world as fierce, and more highly organised, than any of their predecessors.

Sage counsel, belief in principle, and loyalty to comrades were demonstrated in a way that we contemporaries can scarcely realise. The future historian, reviewing the years that followed the Fools' Paradise which floated over England after the War, will be better able to appraise the splendid courage of the London Society in facing the position. Truly Kingsley was right when he wrote—

Still the race of Hero-spirits  
Pass the lamp from hand to hand,

\* \* \* \* \*  
He will dare as dared his fathers,  
Give him Cause as good.

The financial position of the society at the end of March, 1922, was a memorial of the foresight of those who guided the early years of the three associations in the amalgamation. Up to then the land, buildings, fixtures, and rolling stock had cost £1,060,582. This had been depreciated by £313,804 until the property stood in the accounts at only £746,777. The reserve funds were £45,137. The total assets of the society were £1,272,493; on the other side, the liabilities, including shares, were £1,222,355—so that the position was secure against the adverse conditions around. During the War the value of property rose rapidly and many concerns were tempted to suspend depreciation rules and divide the profits of inflation to shareholders, who fancied the financial Millennium was near. The London Co-operative Society maintained its practice of conserving the resources and depreciating its property during the War years. Then came the neap tide.

Competitive traders crashed into the Courts seeking dubious means of attuning themselves to the new environment. But the London co-operators faced the future with confidence. The premises had not assumed a fictitious value; the stocks had been ruthlessly and adequately written down; the zeal of the officials and the staff had been maintained and, through the dark days of the spring of 1922, the committee saw a glimmer of dividend by the end of the year.

#### THE DARKNESS BEFORE THE DAWN.

During the summer employment was slack in the industrial districts of the society. Those members receiving Unemployment Relief from the Poor Law and other authorities were urged to exchange the vouchers for food, &c., at the society's branches. Hundreds of people, who did not want their fellow-co-operators to know they had had to seek such assistance, reluctantly took their vouchers elsewhere; but, in the half year ending September 2nd, food to

the value of £26,009 was supplied on such permits by the Guardians. The growth of distress among members of the society is revealed in the amount of vouchers honoured—

		£
13 weeks ending	December, 1920 .....	1,057
12 " "	March, 1921 .....	3,437
Half year	September, 1921 .....	11,215
" "	March, 1922 .....	23,940
" "	September, 1922 .....	26,009
" "	March, 1923 .....	24,131
" "	September, 1923 .....	19,542

The fact that 5,738 members withdrew from the society in the summer of 1922, that the capital shrank by £57,539, and that the sales fell by 29 per cent to just over a million and a quarter, emphasises the significance of the £26,009 for Food Vouchers in the September half year. The industrial outlook was sullen and the reduced purchasing power of the people was everywhere apparent.

#### TURNING THE CORNER WITH A CHEER.

With the insight of men of thought, action, and vision the committee startled the co-operative world in October, 1922, by advising the payment of a dividend of 6d. in the £ on purchases, transferring £33,000 from the accumulated depreciations in order to give such a boon to the members. Many (trained in the school of Dr. Samuel Smiles, and tinged with the Micawber terror of spending sixpence above income) looked askance at the inversion of co-operative policy. It was without precedent. Veteran co-operators regarded this distribution as the height of folly; it proved to be the depth of wisdom. For a year no dividend had been paid on purchases. The members continued their loyalty to their society, knowing that they were associated with a movement that was greater than the dividend. For the co-operative society was reconciling the interests of producer and consumer, and seeking the welfare of the people on either side of the trading counter.

Hence the steadfastness of more than 100,000 families during the lean year. Recognising that such loyalty had strengthened the organisation, the committee recommended the transfer of a portion of the savings of the prosperous years to ease the way out of the existing doldrums. There was reason and calculation in the suggestion. It was endorsed by the members at the meetings in October, and £29,023 was distributed at the rate of 6d. in the £ on purchases of £1,160,931 for the half year. Thus the society returned to the division of the surplus of the mutual trading among its members.

Parliament had an equally unexpected dividend the following month, in the election to the House of Commons of Mr. A. Barnes, the president, and Mr. R. C. Morrison, a member of the management committee of the London Society, as the representatives of South East Ham and North Tottenham respectively. But that "sign of the times" appears in its appropriate place in Chapter XIX.

The year 1923 opened with a better outlook. The half-yearly report submitted at the April meeting was so indicative of the end of the harassing period through which the society had emerged, that Mr. Barnes felt that he could leave the presidential chair and devote himself to his new duties of voicing the co-operative ideal in the Legislative Chamber. From the chairmanship of the old Stratford Society he had been elected to the presidency of the London Co-operative Society at its inception. He had witnessed its early promise; he had seen its year of stress and strain; and had, like the prophet of old, led the co-operators through the wilderness to the Promised Land where dividends would recur with the regularity of the seasons. His leadership had made his impress on the policy and the plans of the society, and in quitting the chair for a seat "in another place"—to use the parliamentary jargon—he was able to look upon foundations well and truly laid.

## PRESIDENT JOSEPH MATON.

Mr. J. Maton, who had been president of the Edmonton Society for many years, was elected to the chair of the London Society in April, 1923, and continues his leadership with the full confidence of his colleagues, the esteem and respect of the staff, and the goodwill of the members. This is no figure of speech, nor hearsay flattery. He was one of the early members of the Edmonton Society. It is a quarter of a century since I first knew him as the president of that oasis in a suburban co-operative desert. He is just the same Joseph Maton as when presiding over the business meetings of the Edmonton Society. Mr. Maton is a Londoner, born within sound of Bow Bells—if the wind ever carries their tingle to Bethnal Green—and is naturally proud of being the president of the largest food-distributing concern in the city of his birth. In 1919, along with Miss Margaret Bondfield, Mr. G. Bernard Shaw, Mr. R. Smillie, M.P., and Mr. T. Killon (the then chairman of the C.W.S.), he proclaimed the Co-operative message from the Royal Albert Hall, the first time that building had heard the voice of a London co-operator. But it is in the committee room that his influence carries most. For he has the gift of toleration and can appreciate, though not always endorse, the other fellow's point of view. Mr. Maton remembers the day of small things. When Edmonton Society was very young he was one of the sub-committee which met in his own house to recommend Mr. Newton E. Smith as secretary. In those days the store committee rooms were not always available for consultation, often combining a trading and directing purpose. Co-operative leaders lent their rooms as well as gave their services in a way that proved their serious purpose. In the boardroom of the L.C.S. Mr. Maton's personality has been a reconciling force tending to weld various views into amity and co-operative avenues. His committee is composed of men and women of strong opinions; they have been elected as exponents of the

ideas of their constituents. Hence the task of presiding over such a body is one that requires more than tact and knowledge of one's human kind. Character counts for much in the presidential chair; that is the asset that has gained the confidence of "the fifteen" who sit with him as the Co-operative Cabinet, supervising the administration and assuring themselves, and the Society, that it is in full accord with the principles which the L.C.S. declares to the world.

*Revenons à nos moutons.* Membership, capital, trade, and profits advanced. So substantial was the recovery of business that the working costs fell 5d. per £ of sales. The financial results of the half year enabled the committee to allocate £29,644 for the depreciation of land, buildings, and fixtures, £32,790 as a 6d. dividend, and £7,500 for other purposes. In that decided way the restoration of the society to its line of progressive advance was declared to the world.

For the autumnal half year of 1923 the amount available as a disposable balance of profit was £78,224, and, after allocating the sum of £30,056 for the depreciation of land, buildings, and fixtures, and providing £21,591 for interest at the usual rate of 5 per cent on the members' share capital, there was £26,575 available as a result of co-operative trading. A dividend of the modest amount of 4d. in the £ of purchases was recommended. That required £20,843; the residue was allocated to the reserve, educational, political and death benefits funds, while the sum of £744. 12s. 8½d.—note the halfpenny—was carried forward.

The society was on the highroad to prosperity. For the augmented sales had occurred during the holiday season, and at a time when the prices of commodities fell by 6 per cent. This was the first occasion the committee had recorded an increase in the sales since the spring of 1921. The members were urged to raise their weekly purchases by a shilling or two—and so lessen the ratio of standing expenses to the turnover.



But the most significant event of 1923 was the introduction of a new form of trading club—a Mutuality or Provident Club—which quickly proved its restorative value. It has become one of the distinctive features of the London Society. Moreover, its instantaneous and continuous success has fired the imagination of hundreds of other societies which have adapted its methods and ways.

The introduction of the Mutuality Club by the London Society has proved as epoch-making as was the division of dividends on purchases which gave fame to the Rochdale Pioneers. It deserves a chapter to itself. This will be found on page 157.

#### ON THE HIGHROAD—TO NOW.

By the end of 1923 the society had got well into the stride towards profitable returns. In March, 1924, the committee reported that "we are confident that we shall now continue to progress." There has been no backward glance. From the beginning of 1924 the course of the London Co-operative Society has been on the ascent in membership, trade, and capital; it has carried its message of goodwill into scores of new neighbourhoods; it has established fresh services from the East to the West and from the Northern Heights to the riverside; it has won the confidence of "all sorts and conditions of men" and women. There are thousands of people who care little for its political outlook; they do, however, recognise, and share, its economic insight.

Let us return to the chronicle of its advance. The dividend rose to 6d. and a sum of £100,000 was placed on loan with the C.W.S.—a gesture of financial stability and a help to the furtherance of co-operative production. This also found encouragement in the growing proportion of the stocks obtained from co-operative sources. It had been a feature of the trading policy during the whole time Mr. W. H. Elliott had acted as general

manager of the London Society, and previously of that of Stratford—a period of nearly 30 years. He retired, owing to advancing years and failing health, with the hearty wishes of all associated with his endeavours.

Mr. S. Foster, who had been the secretary of the Edmonton Society, and had linked with the new combination as financial secretary, was appointed general manager. He had the assurance of the cordial co-operation of all the employees. The membership was 114,186 and the sales reached nearly a million and a half in the six months prior to his taking the steering wheel. The Labour Budget eased the sugar, tea, cocoa, dried fruits, and coffee duties—an advantage to the consumers which had the effect of lessening the rate of increase in the trade by the society. Some relief was afforded by the abolition of the Corporation Profits Tax, which had cost the London Co-operative Society practically £6,500. The surplus for the members was rising, and towards the end of 1924 a dividend of 8d. in the £ was declared. Business was growing at the rate of £3,000 a week, and 52,500 more customers were served in the dry goods department in the summer and autumn of 1924 than in the corresponding period of the previous year.

#### ACQUIRING OTHER PEOPLE'S BUSINESSES.

Notable in the steady development of new branches was the acquisition of the business of a well-known private trader in Leyton. This was situated at 429, 429a, 431, and 433, High Road, where, for many years, drapery and boot shops had withstood the encircling tendency of the local co-operators. The purchase of a concern that was well established, and the capitulation of the private interests to the collective power of the residents, was a striking testimony of the overwhelming position of the London Society in that district. The event was heralded in the general press as a portent. Co-operators in other places regarded it as an innovation in policy. The early societies had been created by

working men who had put the shillings they had saved into small shops in obscure places and, by steady purchases, created a goodwill limited to their devotion to their own stores. Their hard experience accorded with Matthew Arnold's claim that—

Tasks in hours of insight will'd,  
Can be through hours of gloom fulfill'd.

The purchase of other people's businesses was a dramatic move which excited discussion both within the movement and outside. Under the fostering care of the general manager of the London Society it has been justified by results. Now it is a commonplace occurrence in the expansion of the organisation; and big concerns have been taken over in Hackney, Hammer-smith, and elsewhere. The transfer has had the prompt appreciation of the customers, many having joined with the new owners and become part-proprietors of the shops which they previously supported by their trade. They share the results—a very different order of procedure. Here, again, the London co-operators have set a new fashion in the development of the distributive movement; other societies, like those of the Royal Arsenal, Birmingham, and Liverpool, are now similarly transforming the shopkeeping conditions of their towns.

Simultaneously with the inauguration of the new business policy came Trade and Membership Campaigns which vigorously proclaimed the co-operative message from the tops of buses and trams, in the columns of the press; and by a freshened wave of publicity that broke out with an audacity that alarmed the tradespeople who had previously seen co-operation ambling along familiar and traditional ruts. In nine weeks in January, February, and March, 1925, no fewer than 10,417 new members were enlisted, the average weekly increase for the whole of the half year being 642. They were rewarded with a dividend of 10d. in the £ on the purchases; and ere long, the society was able to place

another £100,000 with the C.W.S., in which its investments totalled over half a million. More private firms were taken over. The co-operative capture of North, East, and West London was becoming clear to all. During the summer and autumn the membership increased by 23,970 to 141,236; and the dividend expanded to 1s.

#### HELPING THE WEAKER BRETHREN.

The Hendon Society was transferred to the London Society in June, 1925. It had 2,133 members with a weekly trade of £770 in three shops in Hendon, another at Edgware, and a fifth in the Hampstead Garden Suburb. The society also possessed a couple of meeting halls. For some years it had struggled. The withdrawal of share capital was suspended and no dividend was paid. The stress of the war years had disheartened many of its folks. Suburban residents neglected its small shops for the larger ones of modern competitors. Even on the Hampstead Garden Suburb where Idealism was supposed to awaken the social consciousness co-operative trading was scorned as the vans of West End shops delivered the goods. The fusion of the old Hendon Society with that of London gave new hope. The expense of taking over and continuing the local stores has been spread over the whole of the society.

It was a piece of self-sacrificing enthusiasm for the Cause. But for the co-operative zeal of the larger unit, the lesser one might have gone under, and added another name to the long list of lost societies. Shouldering the burden, and modernising the stores, the London Society has rehabilitated the movement in this northern area. This, as in the case of some of the other amalgamations, has proved a substantial contribution to the welding and the strengthening of Co-operation into a permanent position in and about the Metropolis of the Empire.

Emboldened by the accession of 23,970 members in the September half year of 1925, a 12 per cent expan-

sion in the capital, carrying it to over £1,659,000; and the record advance of over £400,000 in the trade bringing it near the two million mark the committee (from which Messrs. A. Barnes, M.P., R. C. Morrison, M.P., and Alderman T. M. McGiff, J.P., retired owing to the pressure of public duties) embarked on several fresh ventures. They branched out to Rayleigh, Wickford, Shoeburyness, Chadwell Heath, and Wanstead (in Essex) opened up the ancient borough of Kingston-on-Thames, installed stores in the residential areas of Twickenham, Hounslow, Hanwell, Tottenham and North Finchley, and established butchery shops in the Metropolitan boroughs of Islington and Stoke Newington. They supplied nearly 2,000,000 gallons of milk in the six months between March and September, and extended their sterilised milk rounds to all the regions between Edmonton and Walthamstow, made arrangements for similarly covering the eastern area, decided to build a model dairy on the farm at Ongar to provide grade A. milk, and purchased the Rookery Farm (also at Ongar) comprising house, buildings, and 171 acres of land. With a turnover of £36,500 for the half year, the laundry, established in what had been the old tramcar sheds at Leyton in 1900, was nearing the limit of its capacity, and the equipment of a second laundry was in contemplation.

#### THE NEW INDUSTRIALISM.

To accommodate the growing Works, wheelwrighting, boot repair, shopfitting, and other departments, the buildings of the well-known Industrial School of St. Nicholas, at Manor Park, with its seven acres of land, was purchased. That is now a Co-operative Industrial Colony. Another big dairy is in course of erection on the estate. In the old Manor House, the check office, which deals with one-and-a-quarter million of members' dividend checks per week has been established; in another section are the offices of the Educational Department. This is one of the great enterprises of

the society. Here there are 600 people employed. Their dining and rest rooms are an indication of the spirit of good fellowship and of regard for the welfare of those who serve the great co-operative community.

Robert Owen, more than a hundred years ago, sought to found a model industrial colony at New Lanark. He planned recreation rooms, and sought to organise labour in a natural environment. But that was based on a benevolent scheme of private ownership. When he quarrelled with his partners—one a friend of Elizabeth Fry whose name is recalled in many places in East Ham and round about—the experiment lost its social significance.

Here in Manor Park is a seven acre industrial settlement in which the boot repairers, the carpenters, the joiners, the dairyworkers, the clerks, the wheelwrights, the upholsterers, and all the others in the co-operative service, look out upon gardens and vistas of natural beauty. This St. Nicholas estate has a permanence that New Lanark never knew—for it is owned by a quarter-of-a-million men and women whose partnership is based on Associated Ownership and Collective Employment, not upon the beneficent goodwill of a few men looking for profit, and spurred to altruism by the powerful personality of Owen.

The conversion of an industrial school to industrial uses was but one of the ventures of 1925. For many a year St. John's Church was a landmark in the High Street North, East Ham. Near by is the Town Hall, the Technical School, and other notable buildings of the borough. The site was to be sold; it was bought by the London Co-operative Society. A departmental store with splendid showrooms, an enticing café, and a fashionable hairdressing saloon give a West End aspect to the East Ham High Street.

Gog and Magog, the custodians of the civic traditions of the City of London, must have felt a twinge of expectancy on October 26th, 1925, when the co-operators migrated from Stratford to Winchester House at the

corner of London Wall for their twentieth general quarterly meeting. It marked the breaking down of the commercial barricades, and those who do business in Throgmorton Street must have marvelled at the confidence of the men and women who assembled in the heart of the City to assert that their £1 shares were always at par value—and were not the shuttlecocks of the jobbers and brokers, inside or outside “the House.”

It was at the October meeting of the Stratford Society in 1895 that I was elected to its first educational committee. We met in the Conference Hall, in West Ham Lane. That, and the Stratford Town Hall, sufficed for thirty years—and then the co-operators went forth proudly into the City hall to signalise the coming victory. That general meeting at Winchester House was preceded by seventeen district meetings on the previous Thursday, stretching from Hounslow to Southend and from Barking to Finchley. The whole series formed a chain of co-operative endeavour. These sectional meetings and the final quarterly assembly are among the most important gatherings regularly held in the Metropolis.

#### CONSUMER AND PRODUCER IN CO-OPERATION.

The year 1925 was a wonderful year: for the twelve-month ending March 6th, 1926, the sales were £4,043,631 and the capital was only £96,000 short of two millions. Quite an illuminating display of the co-operative purpose was made in the spring when, in conjunction with the other co-operative societies in London, the London Society was instrumental in reducing the retail price of milk to 6d. per quart before a corresponding reduction in the price paid to the farmers took place. This resulted in a saving to the members of the society of approximately £4,000. Although the distribution at this price during April left practically no margin of profit the committee felt that their action was likely to prove an effective factor in restraining the cost of living from

mounting too high. It was just one striking example of the normal policy of the society in helping the housewife to spend the family revenue to the family's advantage. The effect of this action was to bring down the price of milk all over London.

Later in the year London and the neighbouring co-operative societies made a determined effort to prevent the price of milk rising before October 1st, although the price paid to the farmers advanced on September 1st. This left no profit on the sale; but it substantially helped the mothers and children to a fuller supply of milk. The society's power to set the example in retailing at a low price was proved by its sales of 1,365,349 gallons of raw and 700,934 gallons of sterilised milk in the summer and autumn of 1926.

Then came the great Shadow of the industrial summer. The miners' lock-out shortened supplies, and the coal department, which was doing a normal trade of 10,000 tons a month, shrank almost to nothingness. The society regretted the dispute; sympathy with the families of the locked-out miners led to donations of £7,000 to the various funds raised to help the miners' wives and children. The General Strike found the society with plentiful stocks of foodstuffs, and although the vast traffic organisation had many halts and dislocations, supplies generally were well maintained—the loyalty and help given by the employees ensuring the essential food services. A few days' suspension of the laundry and boot repairing workshop, owing to the withdrawal of transport labour, was one of the incidents of the Strike. The whole circumstance was baffling from the point of view of those seeking a better understanding between the Trade Unions and Co-operative Societies. It proved the need for a closer acquaintance, by trade unionists, with the practices and the aims of co-operators. For the London Co-operative Society had no part in the upheaval; when such disputes occur the trade unions should allow co-operative societies to pursue their peaceful mission



of feeding the people. Such a procedure would do more to link the two movements and enable them to keep time with each other than whole sheaves of resolutions passed in public meeting and branch lodges.

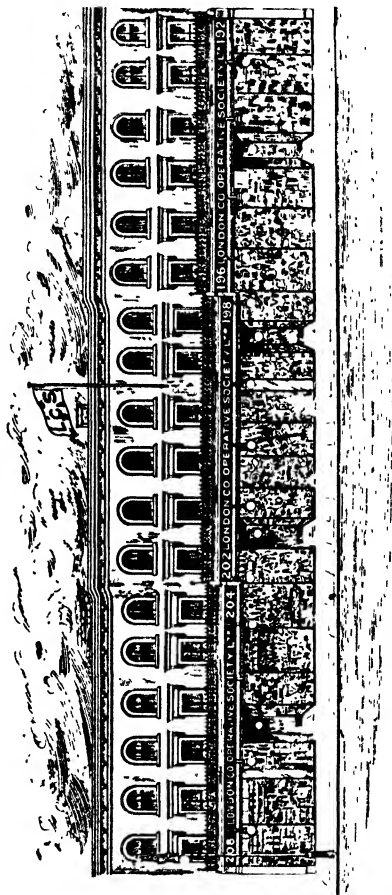
At the October meeting over a score of new departmental stores and shops were reported as in course of preparation and, despite the slackening tendency of the labour troubles in the summer, sales rose over £400,000 to two-and-a-quarter millions in the six months. The year ended with a note of triumph, and the capture of great shopping frontages in the main streets of Hackney and Hammersmith. The famous firm of W. K. Cooper and Co., 192 to 208 Well Street, Hackney, entered the co-operative fold with a complete dry goods store. The old-established business of Hunts (Hammersmith) Ltd., with 13 drapery and furnishing shops, and a furniture depository, came under the flag of the L.C.S. Both these businesses have been converted to a co-operative purpose, and both are doing well. In these places co-operative societies had existed 20 and more years ago. They had flickered and faded out of existence. Like the Phoenix, co-operation has reared itself again in Hackney and Hammersmith—a permanent “boon and blessing” to men and women. The sales of the London Society for the year 1926 were well over five millions; the new Hammersmith co-operators had done their duty.

Last year opened with a membership of over 200,000. The London Society secured the premier place among the distributive co-operative forces of Great Britain. There has been a continuous advance week by week. A new furnishing department at Maryland Street, Stratford, was opened on the site whereon stood the first shop owned by the Stratford Society. That corner building had seen many changes since 1861; it had been used for various businesses. It had remained while the other shops had grown. In the end the little corner shop made way for a modern showroom,

nearly opposite to which the first of the society's jewellery branches has been opened.

A second laundry was equipped at West Ealing, and scores of new shops erected, adapted and opened, notably in Barking and Southend. At the latter place the biscuit factory attained an annual output of over 200 tons. But the greatest venture of the year was the opening of a creamery at Buckingham for the collection of milk from the farmers round about. This was the consummation of six years' work. Farmers in the county of Bucks were in no great hurry to deal with the society; the L.C.S. was, to them, an unknown quantity. Goodwill has been established. The better terms, as compared with those of the milk combine, which the London Co-operative Society has consistently given them, and the sympathetic manner it has met their difficulties, has resulted in a real spirit of confidence and mutual trust between all the parties in this new Co-operation. There are no fewer than 140 farmers in the district taking their milk to the L.C.S. creamery, and the venture is locally recognised as being of great benefit to the Buckingham farmers. At the other end of the journey, the consumers recognise the usefulness of this linking of the producers with their own organisation. Many of the farmers have joined the local co-operative societies, so that the enterprise of the London Society in going 60 miles for its milk, has brought the farmers into friendly touch with the movement as producers and consumers. The milk is brought to the Palmer's Green dairy by the society's own glass-lined tanks, mounted on motor vehicles, thus ensuring delivery in perfect condition.

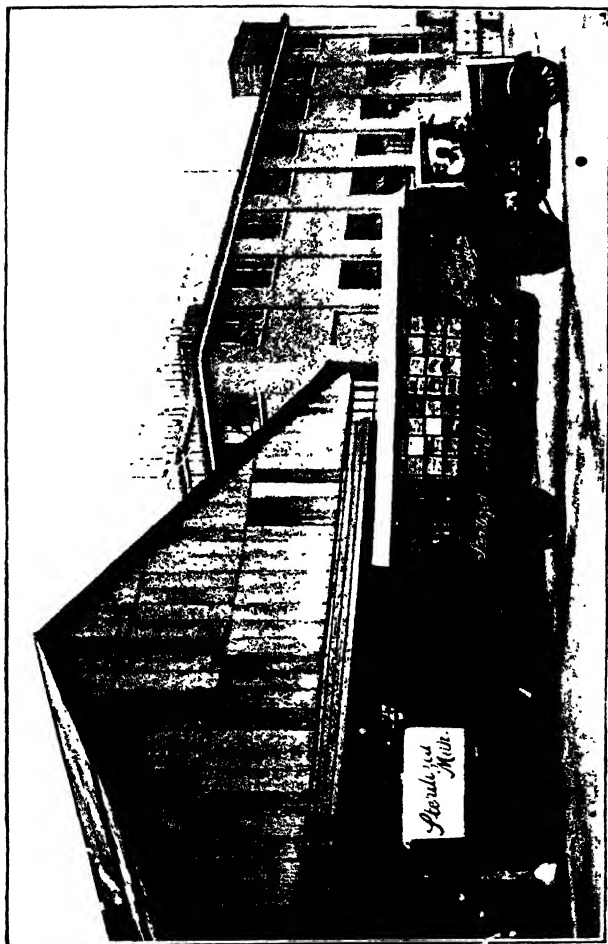
During the year Mr. W. G. Daines was appointed as financial secretary—another home product. For he commenced as a lad in the office of the Stratford Society in 1894; the writer recalls his bright willing penmanship and zealous care of details—qualities that have ample scope in his statistical service for the society he details to the last figure of the column.



## A LONDON CO-OPERATIVE DRAPERY STORE.

This is a view of the range of Drapery and allied shops acquired by the L.C.S. in Well Street, Hackney- and converted to co-operative aims and advantages.

*The building was formerly the property of the late Mr. J. H. & Co. and was converted and re-erected by the L.C.S. in 1906.*



SUPPLYING WEST LONDON WITH MILK FROM THE PARSON'S GREEN DAIRY

## THE PRESENT POSITION.

By the end of 1927 the sales of the society had totalled £6,250,000. This is a phenomenal record in the co-operative movement. For the third year in succession the trade increased by over a million pounds. In the same period the turnover had been more than doubled. Thus the L.C.S. has become the greatest democratic retail organisation for the supply of the daily necessities of the family in the Metropolitan area. It is the society of consumers, started, capitalised, organised, and directed by the consumers, whose continued custom is its goodwill.

The yearly increases in membership have risen from 5,097 in 1924, 38,108 (including 2,133 transferred from Hendon) in 1925, 36,103 in 1926, and 44,989 last year. On September 3rd last, there were 222,328 adherents; they now overtop the quarter of a million. After allowing for the large number of families where wife and husband are both members, the calculated truth will make the number of people linked in the L.C.S. at not less than a million. This is more than a little leavening of the whole lump.

So much for the flowing tide. What of the ebb? Before the War the migratory nature of Londoners was a social phenomenon that interested visitors from the towns of settled industrial conditions. Practically 20 per cent of the people in the Metropolitan boroughs removed from one house to another, or from one district to another every year. Housing conditions have brought the dwellers in London to a stationary point. This and the fact the London Co-operative Society operates over such a wide area has prevented the leakage of members from co-operative societies that was previously a restraining weight on progress. "Once a co-operator, always a co-operator" is becoming a trait of the thousands who join. In 1924, the society lost 5 per cent of its members by withdrawals—caused by removal, unemployment, death and other causes. In 1925, only 4 per cent lapsed; in 1926, it fell to 3·8 per cent, and

last year to 3·6 per cent. That is evidence of the satisfaction of over two hundred thousand adult men and women with the institution that is their own—maintained by their own savings and custom.

On September 3rd last the society's capital amounted to £2,605,298, an increase during the half year of £211,604 over the corresponding half of 1926. The average amount of share capital per member rose from £9. 19s. 6d. to £10. 2s. 5d. during the last six months. Having had access to the inner financial working of the society, I find that the average shareholdings are considerably higher in the eastern area. This is due to the long period that the old Stratford Society existed before the others in the combination got going; but here a shadow creeps over the London outlook. For the last half year the dividend and interest transferred to the share capital account was £125,828, equivalent to 70·46 of the allocation for dividend and interest. A year ago 71·71 of the allocation was allowed to accumulate as share capital; this slight reduction is due to the economic conditions that compel more of the members to withdraw their dividend and interest for immediate use. Thus the value of the society as affording an opportunity for giving the members easy facilities for obtaining their dividends, interest, and capital to meet current urgent outgoings is realised. The store system not only secures good goods; it assures the members of the security of their savings and the prompt withdrawal of their capital—without discount brokerage or the minor deductions that, in the aggregate, make up the fortunes of the great financiers.

One of the merits of the co-operative system is the fullest information given to the members as to how the committee, elected by popular vote, administer their affairs. The balance sheet of the L.C.S. is a compendium of operations that detail with audited accuracy the course of business.

Departmental details are available to any member for the asking. Many want to know how trade is going.

They are told the proportion of trade in various departments, how many times a year the stock is turned over, and many other comparisons that give them a clear idea of the business that is their own. In the statistical department the keen analytical qualities of the present manager has evidence, for when in the office of the old Edmonton Society he was wont to guide the committee by the preparation of tables of costs which went to a few decimals—for accuracy's sake. Now this is supervised by the financial secretary.

From him I learn that the stocks are turned over 10 times a year—grocery 14 times, drapery 2.25, clothing 6, boots 3, furnishing 3, and the eatables, of course, every day or every week. Here is an illuminating table as to the proportion in which the departments contribute to every £1 of trade:—

WHERE THE TRADE IS DONE.

	September, 1927.		
	s.	d.	Per cent
Grocery .....	10	1.76	50.74
Bakery .....	1	2.43	6.01
Bread Shops .....	0	3.75	1.56
Butchery .....	1	6.75	7.81
Greengrocery .....	0	1.02	0.42
Dairy.....	1	10.36	9.32
Drapery .....	1	3.05	6.27
Clothing .....	0	10.82	4.51
Boot.....	0	8.03	3.25
Hardware .....	0	2.33	0.97
Furnishing .....	0	6.57	2.74
Coal .....	0	11.02	4.59
Laundry .....	0	3.37	1.41
•Farm.....	0	0.19	0.08
Charabancs .....	0	0.39	0.16
Engineering.....	0	0.13	0.05
Works .....	0	0.03	0.01
£	1	0.0	100.00

## THE DEVELOPMENT OF ADMINISTRATIVE POLICY.

IN its development the London Co-operative Society has always looked forward. Concerned with the co-operative organisation of three-fourths of a great City, with a population of between four and five million people, the society must plan its extension well ahead. At the beginning of every year Mr. S. Foster, the general manager, prepares a budget of estimated expenditure and revenue, in order to gauge the possible development for the coming twelvemonth. This is suggestive of new branches in fresh areas; the placing of complete departmental stores in districts which have been prepared by the success of smaller premises; the opening of service departments linked with existing shops; the further co-ordination of delivery routes; the institution of new methods and policies in business details; the introduction of the society into new neighbourhoods; the organisation of trade campaigns and other matters calculated to develop the trading interests of the society. These points have to be considered in conjunction with the various sectional and departmental managers, so that a complete programme of work can be devised for the year.

This has to be budgeted with due regard to the possible expansion of capital and the utilisation of existing resources—so as to avoid overlapping and to fill in the gaps that appear in the co-operative map. Then the projects are reviewed at a special session of the committee, where criticism, examination, and minute investigation of the programme is made by men and women living in various districts, possessing different outlooks, and primed with knowledge gained



from their personal acquaintance with the needs of the consumers and the opportunities that exist for the amplification of co-operative interests. This meeting is one of the most important of the year. The schemes suggested may involve the expenditure of anything up to half a million pounds. Their acceptance, or variation, settles the order of progress for the twelve-month and constitutes a powerful lever for the immediate future.

• Thus the democratic control of business operates. The committees of co-operative societies have great responsibilities. That of the L.C.S. legislates for the household requirements of a million people. Their interpretation of co-operative principles and policy conditions the service of 6,500 employees, and challenges the competitive commerce in its shops, warehouses, and offices. Hence the importance of those elected to superintend and authorise the administrative affairs of the concern. One third of the committee are women; they all represent the consumers in the membership. Their attitude to the varied factors that make for the financial and trading security of the society determines the atmosphere in which the work is done. The committee of the London Co-operative Society are the legislators; they leave the administration to the experienced secretarial and managerial staffs who work all the better for the knowledge that they have the confidence of those in authority. Thus the committee controls affairs in the spirit of the democratic government that it embodies in its topmost niche in the co-operative structure. Many of the details are dealt with by sub-committees who receive reports, interview departmental managers, inspect the shops and premises, consider the fluctuations in trade, examine the future prospects, and generally specialise in the particular section to which they are allotted.

Their conclusions are communicated to all the members of the full board for their observation and judgment. In that way the weekly meeting has a

value and importance commensurate with the institution it serves.

There are four sub-committees :—

- No. 1.—Grocery, Drapery, Boots, Furnishing, Outfitting, Greengrocery.
- No. 2.—Bakery, Laundry, Dairy, Coal, Butchery.
- No. 3.—Works, Engineering, Traffic, Stables.
- No. 4.—Office and Finance.

Such a concentration on specific matters by the sub-committees secures a constant watchfulness, and develops a skilled training in the direction of affairs that entitles the board of management to the respect of the members by whom it is elected. The committee is the custodian of the key to the greater business possibilities of the future. In creating a tradition of wise statesmanship in shopkeeping, the L.C.S. committee has set a high standard. When it reviews the reports that are presented by the various departments it brings to their consideration a wide knowledge of affairs.

There is no doubt that this way of scheduling schemes of advance and working to a programme has stabilised the policy of the society. There are no tangential sidelines drawn across the business development. Everything is considered in relation to the other areas, sections, or departments—and all are decided in the light of the financial possibilities. Thus nothing is authorised until all the avenues of successful realisation are explored. The institution of a new departmental store in a fresh area may involve reports from the office as to the local membership, from the Mutuality Club collectors as to the proportion of customers likely to be obtained from the immediate neighbourhood, an examination of the existing trading facilities, inquiry as to the character of the local demand, the convenience of the tram and bus routes for bringing the members from adjacent districts, the amount of work already in hand by the society's works department, the proportion of share capital held by resident members in relation

to the outlay involved, the intensity of the expressed desire of the members roundabout, and many other details that affect the stabilised growth of a big concern.

The society, too, is fortunate in having a combination of expert departmental managers who are enthusiastic co-operators. Most of them have grown with the society; they have become imbued with its idea of associative endeavour. And although each makes the success of his, or her, own section the primary interest, they all recognise that they are working in harmonious relationship to the whole society. Permeated with that idea they recognise that the daily routine becomes the Adventure of Life. Initiative is encouraged, and the fraternity of the departments secures the harmonious co-operation of all—committee, managers, and employees generally, for the welfare of the membership.

Many of the failures of co-operative branches in the latter years of last century were due to the establishment of stores by committees in response to the zealous advocacy of a few enthusiasts without knowledge of business conditions. The old Battersea and Tower Hamlets societies were weakened by starting new branches in districts which were not ready for the co-operative idea. Scores of societies failed for want of adequate capital. Such reactions are not likely to occur again in London, for the great society that is now organising the consumers in the majority of the boroughs is able to take the long view, and by averaging the capital spent on its enterprises to continue unremunerative shops until the people become convinced of the benefits of co-operation. The firm co-operators of the North-Western region were assisted when the London Society took over their responsibilities, and the movement in many of the Thames parishes about Twickenham found salvation when some of the languishing branches of the Staines Society were absorbed by the London organisation. Once within the care of the London Society the struggling ventures have had expert guidance and solid support from a combina-

tion that rejoices in being able to contribute much from the fullness of its own resources and experience.

Thus the London Society looks at London as a whole. Local claims are considered and dealt with according to their place in the Co-operative Commonwealth. In January the planning for an expenditure during 1928 of half a million of money was a serious responsibility for the committee. But when the schemes were approved all the various sections were able to get promptly to work in fashioning the society to modern notions of shopping and service.

Not only does the society anticipate and regularise its expanding territory and enterprises. It deliberately plans its own rate of growth. There is a delightful confidence in its Publicity methods—with which the management associates in a way that proves the homogeneity of the whole concern. There are no loose ends; every section is related and co-ordinated to its corresponding part, and the committee directing affairs are really workers in an industrial mosaic, piecing together with proper regard to the symmetry and tone of each constituent part the numerous units in the co-operative organisation. At the present time an appeal is being made for 25,000 new members. Judging from the response to previous campaigns this number will be exceeded.

## THE MUTUALITY CLUB.

THE Mutuality Club was introduced into the Co-operative Movement while the present manager of the L.C.S. was assisting Mr. Newton E. Smith as secretary of the Edmonton Society. There have been many varieties of Clubs in the co-operative societies for the last half century. They have all hinged on the invitation to the member to make the weekly contributions at the Store. The Mutuality Club is based upon the missionary spirit. This is the potent factor that differentiates it from all the types of Clubs that have been set up in the North and the Midlands. About 15 years ago some of the members of branches of the Edmonton Society introduced outside Provident Credit Clubs among their sister-associates. They were private speculations. Mr. Newton Smith, whose services to the movement in North London were great, endeavoured to circumvent such unwarranted use of co-operative auxiliaries, and inaugurated a similar club under the style of Mutuality to which the Guildswomen were officially introduced. It was, however, based on the "Cash" principle, and perhaps, because of this, had a vicarious sort of existence. Mr. S. Foster had much to do with the details of its management and pigeon-holed its possibilities for use should occasion occur.

Then when the position of the London Society became streaked with financial scars he cogitated as to the likelihood of a Mutuality revival. While engaged in writing this history I had a chat with Mr. A. W. Golightly, the chairman of the International Co-operative Wholesale Society—and a whilom president of the old Stratford Society—and Mr. S. Foster. We were examining the results and discussing the effect on the character

and credit of co-operation. Quite incidentally, and in a characteristically modest way, Mr. Foster let fall a secret that he had previously not told even to his Committee. It was a revelation of the thoroughness and the certainty with which the Society is guided by this Man of Kent, who is essentially a product of the office training of the movement. When he was thinking over the restoration of the Society from the assaults of bad times and the heavy responsibilities undertaken in the interests of the weaker societies, he determined to test the nature of the soil in which any new scheme would have to find root and obtain nourishment. Selecting a hundred members resident in the Stratford New Town district, he made personal inquiries of the women, at their own doors, as to how they obtained the clothes for their families and made any necessary replenishment of their household goods. A few resented his interest in their domestic arrangements; others were more communicative, and confessed that although they went to the Stores for their groceries they obtained drapery and clothing from a Credit Club whose collector called regularly for the shilling and supplied them with the articles they wanted. They realised that they were at the mercy of this modern copyist of the "Scotch draper" or "tallyman." In extenuation it was pleaded that they could not accumulate lump sums with which to purchase such goods. Some wives suggested that the saving of twenty or thirty shillings in the house would have led their husbands into temptation. The Credit Club charged a poundage of a shilling and the customer paid a guinea for what was ostensibly the loan of a pound wiped out in instalments. There was no appeal against the quality of the commodities. The women generally agreed that they paid high prices for low-grade articles. But they got them by such means; otherwise they would have remained beyond their reach. Calculating the results of his scrutiny of the dwellers in typical streets, Mr. Foster ascertained that 60 per cent of the co-operators living near the central

stores of the Stratford portion were attracted from their own shops by the alluring wiles of the Creditors. Then he determined to suggest a new policy directly designed to

1. Meet the *needs* of those members who by habit or circumstance are obliged to purchase clothing and footwear under the weekly system.
- 2. Secure for the customers the full value of the sum expended.
- 3. Enable the members to obtain more of their requirements from their own Stores.
4. Increase the trade of the dry-goods departments, and so extend Co-operative employment both in the shops and the manufactories.
5. Assist the housewife to organise her domestic expenditure to the best advantage.

Such advantages for those who obtained goods on credit were also intended to help the members who paid cash. For by turning the stocks over more frequently the selections would be newer, fresher, and of the latest fashion. Then, too, by increasing the trade the ratio of expenses and overhead charges would be reduced with a view to these departments contributing their share of profit towards the general rate of dividend to be paid, and adding to the sum available for the extension of co-operative service.

This combination of Idealism with Business has proved that the foundations of the Mutuality Club are sound. It has invoked the loyalty of the members; although it has provoked some criticism from those to whom the words Cash Trading were as blessed as was that of Mesopotamia in the old days. In establishing the new form of co-operative business the London Society struck an original vein which has produced a double gain. For the Mutuality Club brought an avalanche of new trade that swept away old losses and cleared the Valley of Despond.

Let us see some of the effects on the Society of the introduction of the Mutuality Club System. The total

trade of the Dry Goods Section (drapery, boots, furnishing, outfitting, and hardware) for the year immediately preceding the introduction of the Club, was £210,866. Four years later the sales for the year amounted to £985,211, and of this sum £535,173 was done through the Mutuality Club.

The average purchases per member through these Dry Goods Departments in 1923 was £1. 18s. 8d. Last year it was £4. 8s. This vast improvement has been brought about owing to the increased facilities that have been provided and especially to the Club. Perhaps the strongest evidence that can be advanced to support the necessity and usefulness of Mutuality Clubs is in the fact that the average purchases per Club member in the Dry Goods Departments is now £7 per annum, as compared with the general average of £4. 8s. already mentioned. The increase in turnover has naturally had a satisfactory effect in reducing the rate of expenses, and whereas a trading loss was shown in the departments in 1923 a substantial net profit of £84,778 was made in 1927. The L.C.S. has now got 80,000 Mutuality Club members, called on weekly by 400 Club collectors.

The trade revival was not the only benefit of Mutuality. Its messengers are the missionaries of the Society. They collect the shillings of the members on their doorsteps; they explain the hidden meaning of the Dividend; they tell of the services rendered by the Society; they interest the women in their own shops and generally and gently persuade the "people as to the merits of minding their own business—the co-operative store.

In the report of the Chief Registrar of Friendly Societies for 1926—issued at the end of January, 1928—reference is made to the fact that the London Co-operative Society "originated the 'Mutuality' Club system at the beginning of 1923" and that the method has been introduced by many other societies with the view of stimulating trade. Thus we have the official



recognition of the London Society as the initiators of a new policy in co-operation that is likely to have as abiding an influence as has that of the communal sharing of profits adopted by its predecessor a hundred years ago, and of the individualistic distribution of dividends with which the name of Rochdale became associated a few years later. Mutuality is certainly the word of the Future.

The institution of the Mutuality Club necessitated the consent of the members, for the rule read—

The business of the society shall be conducted for ready money, except as to goods sold on the furnishing hire-purchase system.

Promptly the committee convened special general meetings to alter the rule, and it was then laid down, in 1923, that

The business of the society shall, as far as practicable, be conducted for ready money ; but credit may be allowed at the discretion of the committee.

Thus the members are the final authority as to the order and policy of the society. Recognising that the Mutuality Club system was tackling the problem of reaching all grades of society, they readily responded to the advice of those elected to the management. Democratic control adapted itself to the conditions that obtained under the new circumstances of the times.

## THE TEAM SPIRIT IN EMPLOYMENT.

Not only has the L.C.S. suffused the commercial world of the Empire City with a rich co-operative glow ; it has quickened the co-operative spirit within the movement. As societies grow they have new problems. The personal association between committees, members, and employees is close and intimate in the medium-sized organisations. But when the number of workers rises to 6,500, the maintenance of the interest of the employees demands the qualities of constructive statesmanship. The London Society has had to evolve a policy of harmony from within its own experience and attuned to the idealism for which it stands. When in the first years of its operations the stability of the society was assured, the directors, with the general manager, thought out plans for preserving the constant zeal of the 2,000 productive and 4,500 distributive workers, who have secured, to that extent, "the self-employment of the members."

The collective organisation of the society is not allowed to overwhelm personality and individuality. Modern business makes men into "time machines." Employment in large houses often dulls initiative and discourages the younger folks, who find themselves in a queue of disappointment. Fortunately the extension of the society has been so rapid that promotions from behind the counter to places of responsibility have come along at a phenomenal rate. At two meetings, in January the committee appointed fifteen new branch managers and promoted a similar number of first-counter men. The knowledge that everyone has a chance of preferment works wonders in maintaining the efficiency of service. The bakers' vanboy knows

that he is not in a blind alley ; some day he will be driving a van or have some other congenial employment.

They do not want round men in square holes in the L.C.S. ; and the system of employees' training and instruction gives a chance to every young person to find a proper place. Mr. J. N. Webster has just been appointed assistant general manager ; he began as a lad at the Barking branch ; graduated in shopkeeping at the East Ham branch ; exercised tact and experience as shop inspector of the society ; and was accessible to all as an intermediary between the centre and the circumference of the co-operative circle. As the staff and sales manager of the grocery department since 1924 he has done much to familiarise the public with the smart displays in the modern standardised shops of the L.C.S. His latest promotion was greeted by his colleagues with a cheer. They saw in his advance a recognition of sterling service such as will secure their reward in the future. His success was the success of the team of which he was a member. Rudyard Kipling caught something of the spirit of co-operative service when he wrote :—

It ain't the guns nor armament,  
Nor funds *that they* can pay ;  
But the close co-operation,  
That makes them *win the day*.  
It ain't the individual,  
Nor the army as a whole,  
But the everlastin' team work  
Of every bloomin' soul.

New branches are opened nearly every week, fresh transport facilities are constantly needed, and developments in specialised industries are always under consideration. Last year the society opened 10 grocery shops, 17 butchery shops, 5 dairies, 3 clothing, and 4 hardware departments, a laundry, 2 cafés, 3 drapery, 4 green-grocery, 3 boot, and 2 furnishing shops. Hence the eagerness of the young employees to make good in their corner of the concern. They know they have a fair chance of larger service ; they also know that

they have a definite share in the increased trade of the shops to which they are appointed. The members have a dividend on purchases; the shopmen have a bonus above their trade union rates of payment. All must be members of a union. Beyond the conditions that such membership ensures, the employees of each shop share in its advancing prosperity. The Society's system of "Collective Bonus"—probably unique in the co-operative movement—ensures this.

“ The branches are officially graded according to their facilities, environment, and opportunity for expansion. If the sales exceed the estimated return, a bonus on every extra £ of trade is allotted to the whole body of employees in that establishment. They divide it as a team. The standard of trading achievement is periodically determined—not only by office calculation, but with a human perspective of the accountancy estimates. Thus they all share in the satisfaction of the customers. The Locarno spirit of goodwill that the nations tremulously approve is actually realised in the relations between the people on each side of the counter in the L.C.S. stores. Having thus found the monetary advantage of close attention to business, the employees are next encouraged to strive for honour. There are Shop Leagues, and the struggle for the topmost rung makes the pursuit of business as keen a sport as the Cricket Championship. Such incentives add a spice of interest to the daily routine and shopkeeping becomes a Life's Adventure. The employees have a pride in their work that would gratify Ruskin, Carlyle, William Morris, and the other Victorians who wanted the dignity of labour to be united with an equitable recompense.

Something of this feeling pervades the society. It seeks to overtake the higher costs of living since the War and leave to the worker a better margin for the enjoyment of the domestic hearth and home. Thus in 1927 the percentage increase in the cost of living was about 68 per cent over 1914. A comparison with the wages paid to the distributive workers in the society

reveals that their wages had been increased by 110 per cent, whilst those shopworkers participating in the Collective Bonus Scheme, already referred to, had, in addition, nearly £10,000 divided among them. Moreover, the hours for clerks were reduced to 42, and of the general staff to 48 hours per week. Improved conditions in regard to wages during sickness and longer periods for summer holidays has been the policy.

Nor must we omit the educational facilities afforded to juniors: the sports ground and opportunities for social intercourse in clubs, dramatic societies and the like, the Benevolent Fund, and the scheme of Pensions, which ensure that there shall be a comfortable competence when, at the age of 65, rest should be in view. The conditions of service are good, and the services rendered under such conditions are equally good.

## THE EDUCATIONAL OUTLOOK.

ITS educational work is one of the assets of the London Co-operative Society. For it brings together thousands of the members to consider the problems that come up for settlement. It is attracting young people to the society as a social influence as well as a business concern. Previously co-operation was largely a middle-age movement; now it is winning the young folks and drawing them into co-operative ways. That is a new fact. The work of the educational committee in catering for the adolescents will have a full harvest.

In one of my last conversations with J. M. Ludlow, in his home at Shepherd's Bush, I heard from him something of the difficulties of the Christian Socialists in promoting co-operative societies.

When we started the workmen's associations in the fifties [he said], there was not one workman in a thousand fit for education. They were uneducated; they lacked confidence in each other; they had no education.

The modern societies have made education a feature of their activities. From Toynbee Hall the old Tower Hamlets Society drew Alfred (later, Lord) Milner, A. H. Dyke Acland, Corrie Grant, M.P., Professor (Lord) Bryce, Mr. Vaughan Nash (now chairman of the Development Commission), and others, into the class room. West London had the interest of the Bishop of London, who had helped the local co-operative society when he was at the Oxford House, in Bethnal Green, and who lent the grounds of Fulham Palace for an annual fête which drew the thousands. Edmonton and Stratford had each fostered the educational spirit, among those who helped them being Mr. J. Ramsay MacDonald, M.P., and Mr. J. R. Clynes, M.P., while Toynbee Hall and Mansfield House gave assistance in

the provision of teachers and lecturers of the right type. The three societies now merged in that of London each had their educational programme. All gave a percentage of the profit to the promotion of social pleasures and the spread of knowledge among the members. When the amalgamation took place the co-ordination of the various phases of educational activity was a piece of constructive coding in which the secretaries of the Stratford and Edmonton committees, Messrs. T. I. Lethaby and A. E. T. Wilson did well. Mr. L. Mansfield took over the work. He was followed by Mr. T. M. McGiff, J.P., who was the first full-time co-operative educational secretary in the London Society. As an alderman of East Ham, a whilom member of the general committee, and a member of the Central Board of the Co-operative Union, he brought to his important office knowledge, experience, and a zealous disposition that find full exercise in administering the work for which his committee are the legislators.

The policy is directed by a committee of 15 who, with a representative from the General Committee, administer the funds provided by the grant of  $2\frac{1}{2}$  per cent from each half year's trading surplus for educational work. They are responsible for the initiation, the provision and oversight of the educational and social facilities. To enumerate them requires a handbook of 64 pages. Its perusal gives proof of the comprehensive outlook.

There are classes in Co-operation, Economics, Industrial History, Social Science, Economic Geography, Local Government, Salesmanship, Elocution and Dramatic Art, Literature, and other subjects in which people of middle age, as well as the younger generation are interested. Altogether 50 adult classes are held in association with the Co-operative Union, the W.E.A., the National Council of Labour Colleges, and local education authorities. The fees are only 2s. for 12 meetings fortnightly, or 4s. for 24 meetings weekly in the session. These are refunded if 75 per cent of the

possible attendances are made. Scholarships at the Co-operative College, or the Summer Schools, are offered in all the classes.

Like the management committee the educationists have had their financial problems. During the two lean years they kept some of the work going without funds. Zealous friends maintained the guilds and circles in the true spirit of co-operation; when the dark clouds lifted the activities were resumed with a radiant outlook. They participated in the International Co-operators' Day, and formed a Travel Guild for the enjoyment of holidays abroad; a summer camp on the society's farm at Ongar cheered the children; the London *Wheatsheaf* recovered its size, and revived the message of its predecessor, the *Stratford Co-operator*, and last year 5,427 entries in the children's competition demonstrated to the National Co-operative Propaganda Campaigners the initiative of the committee and the response of the young co-operators. One-day schools for employees and members, with conferences, lectures, and concert-meetings have become a regular feature of the educational programme. Addresses by Co-operative and other M.P.'s and qualified advocates add to the value of the gatherings.

Children's Circles are one of the hopeful phases of the work. They link the youngsters with the stores so that when they grow up they may not turn away from the source of their evening pleasures as boys and girls. The L.C.S. has 57 of these Children's Circles conducted by leaders who love the work of guiding and helping young people. The age limit is 8 to 16 years. Here the members learn something of the way the world wags, and are taught the principles of co-operation, Justice for all, the Oneness of Humanity, and the part that Sympathy and Love play in the relations between nations as well as in the family and business life. Folk dancing and handicraft work add interest to the meetings. In the winter lantern lectures inform, and in the



summer camps on the society's farm delight the young co-operators.

From the Children's Circle the way is easy to the Comrades' Circles for those from 16 to 25 years. There are ten of such classes for the adolescents with a Circles' Council that is increasing the importance of this section of the work.

The Co-operative Guilds—Women's, Men's and Mixed—number 111 meeting periodically in every district, and constituting a great educational driving force. The National Men's Guild movement originated at Stratford, due to the persistent efforts of Mr. W. Chas. Potter, a member of the L.C.S. General Committee.

Choral singing is an important feature of the programme. When the National Co-operative Festivals began at the Crystal Palace in 1890, the choir of 5,000 voices on the Handel Orchestra was drawn from the Temperance and other choirs. Co-operators, in those days, could not sing in unison. Steadily, however, they came into harmony; the old societies of Stratford, West London, and Edmonton, formed choirs to help the Festival. The choir at Stratford was begun in 1900. Mr. Alfred Sears was appointed conductor, and still leads the Stratford Co-operative Ladies' Choir to distinction in choral contests. Early in 1914 the Southern Co-operative Choral Association was formed to revive the old Co-operative Festivals, and in conjunction with the Edmonton Society a Festival was held at the Alexandra Palace. Five of the societies represented in that event are now incorporated in the L.C.S. Their work has continued, and the broadcasting of a concert by the combined choirs of the London, the Royal Arsenal, the South Suburban, and the Enfield Highway Co-operative Societies was one of the features of the musical season of 1926. A similar event at the Royal Albert Hall gave distinction to 1927. This year the Education Committee is holding the first Annual Co-operative Musical Competition Festival, with adjudicators of national eminence.

## CHAPTER XIX.

### THE POLITICAL RECORD.

LONDON contributed much to the political policy of the co-operative movement. In 1867 Thomas Hughes, the author of *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, lost his seat at Lambeth because he was a co-operator, and in 1857 G. J. Holyoake's candidature for the old borough of Tower Hamlets was frustrated for the same reason. But when, during the War, the attitude of the Government towards the general body of consumers became strongly anti-co-operative, the whole movement was drawn into the political arena, and the first purely political conference organised by co-operators was held at the Central Hall, Westminster, in October, 1917. Some of the committee of the subsequent London Co-operative Society had served on the War Workers' Emergency Committee, of which Mr. J. S. Middleton was the secretary, and where the late H. M. Hyndman acknowledged the sufficiency of the co-operative society to organise the distribution of the daily necessities of the people. The conference at Westminster towards the end of 1917 marked the definite advance to participation in the public life of the nation. When the London Co-operative Society came into being a London Co-operative Representation Committee was formed to develop the political work in accordance with the policy of the Co-operative Movement as a whole. It has direction of the grant of 2½ per cent of the surplus, and much of its work has been of an educational character, such as the organisation of week-end schools and conferences to consider and examine the civic and political implications of co-operation. It

publishes the *London Citizen* for South East Ham, South Hammersmith, and North Tottenham, and touches the society's membership through the 33 Political Councils it has established, with a paying membership of 2,000. These are linked with the Political Committee by means of the area—North, East and West—sub-committees, which are the governing body in their respective regions.

Some idea of the expansive region over which the committee operates was gained during the discussions on the Corporation Profits Tax. There were 38 M.P.'s, whose constituencies were supplied by branches of the L.C.S. Of these four were for the imposition and 13 against; the remaining 21 abstaining from voting. Doubtless such timidity was engendered in some cases by a recognition of the strength of the opposition to an imposition of a tax which laid heavy tribute on the mutual trading organisation of consumers—as distinct from the corporations of investors whose tolls from the public it was intended to lessen, in the interests of the public.

The society has two M.P.'s, whose elections have been won under the auspices of the L. C. Representation Committee. At the next election it will also contest South Hammersmith, Mr. D. Chater being the prospective candidate.

A glance at the election records of the Co-operative M.P.'s is interesting, for each has increased his poll at each of the three successive elections. Such a steady advance is almost unique, and reveals a stability of support that has confounded those who doubted the wisdom of widening the co-operative sphere of influence. At the elections of 1922 and 1923 the co-operative candidates each had two opponents, excluding an odd fourth who appeared in North Tottenham in 1922. Then, in 1924, the orthodox parties coalesced; Mr. Alfred Barnes had a Liberal opponent only and Mr. R. C. Morrison was challenged by a Conservative alone. The result was the same as in previous years. Here

are the number of votes polled by the successful candidates at each of the elections :—

	Mr. Barnes, South-East Ham.	Mr. Morrison, North Tottenham.
1922 .....	10,566 .....	10,250
1923 .....	11,402 .....	12,696
1924 .....	13,644 .....	13,800

Both M.P.'s have established their positions in the House of Commons as representing constituencies which are fully alive to the new economic conditions foreshadowed by the Co-operative Party. During the Labour Government Mr. Morrison was private secretary to the Premier, and Mr. Alfred Barnes was engaged in a similar capacity, with the Rt. Hon. William Graham the Financial Secretary to the Treasury. Thus did the co-operators of London gain access to the centre of Government. Lord Rosebery once told co-operators that they were "a State within the State." We are now proving more—we are the State.

The Political Committee, of which Mr. W. Harnwell is the secretary and which has offices at 58, Romney Street, Westminster, is also concerned with the civic life of London. In addition to its two M.P.'s, a lady member of the society's management committee is a London County Councillor, and 18 other co-operators sit on local borough and district councils, and 10 on boards of guardians, all elected directly under the auspices of the L. C. Political Committee, whose Pioneer Van is an effective mobile force in the open-air education of the people. Moreover, there are 24 M.P.'s and the wives of 8 M.P.'s in the society's membership.

As chairman of the National Co-operative Party, Mr. Alfred Barnes, M.P., was the central figure at the Co-operative Congress of 1927, when the movement responded to his appeal to endorse and emulate the political policy of the London Co-operative Party and work, when the local members wished, in alliance with those of the Labour Party.

## CHAPTER XX.

# THE DREAM THAT WILL COME TRUE.

A HUNDRED years have gone since the idea of "unrestrained Co-operation" was published in London by the apostles of Owenism. The London Co-operative Society of 1824-34 has been re-incarnated in one that has stood the test of seven years in a troubled Peace. In the intervening decades the principle of collective trading has been buffeted by the upholders of privileged possession. Sometimes it has been deflected from its primary purpose ; but the sacrifices of the men and women who have had a Co-operative Consciousness have preserved it from suppression. Right through the Century some gleam of mutual trading has lingered in one or other of the boroughs in which the Metropolis has been divided against itself. Every district has borne testimony to the Co-operation that is a "Law of Life." Permeating the great Capital with its invigorating spirit, the Co-operative Idea has conquered.

London is now in a state of flux. Its streets are widening, and slums are disappearing in the process ; its architecture is reaching heights that were impossible before lifts and escalators were installed ; the business regions are leaving Cheapside for Oxford Street and Regent Street ; the night population of the city could be fed from any of the smaller branches of the L.C.S. ; tourists daily jostle with the lawyers of Chancery Lane, and the Strand and Charing Cross are part of the playground of American millionaires as well as visitors from the co-operative societies of the provinces.

These are the outward signs that have transmogrified

the appearance of London. In the Sixties the central organisations of co-operators were located about Oxford Street—near the Castle Street East (now Eastcastle Street) where the co-operative tailors' workshop (advocated by Charles Kingsley in *Alton Locke*) had presented a phase of the eternal Co-operative Idea, and not far away from the Charlotte Street whence Robert Owen foreshadowed his New Moral World. The scene of central co-operation has shifted. For trading purposes it is now in Leaman Street—standing sentinel near the site of the house where Chaucer lived, and within the borough of Stepney where Sir Thomas More visited Dean Colet and discussed *Utopia*. The political outlook of the L.C.S. is directed from 58, Romney Street, Westminster, and the meetings of its Education Committee are held in Pall Mall—for the convenience of the members who live N., E., and W. London. These changed conditions are symptomatic of what has happened in the daily life of the City. Big Business has gone westward; the East has become a congeries of nationalities from all the known world fringed with the dormitories of those who earn their living in the ever-moving commercial circle. Away in the North are more suburban dormitories reached by tubes, trams and other forms of traffic that link warehouses, offices, and factories with the places in which their workers by day sleep at night.

Never before in the advancing history and mystery of this wonderful London did the co-operative movement have such manifestation as now—700 of its vehicles go out every day carrying food and fuel for the families. The L.C.S. has 300 shops at the service of the people, and every week a million and a quarter purchases are recorded in the check office centralised at the Co-operative Industrial Colony at Manor Park. As already told, its sales are over £6,250,000 a year, and its membership represents more than a million women, men, and children—the women coming first in the enumeration, for they are the mainspring of the growing trade. With such a

demonstration of Co-operation in 1928 we naturally look into the Future.

Our predecessors aimed at getting a co-operative repository in every main thoroughfare. That consummation is now being featured by the L.C.S. What next?

Based upon the solid foundation of the trade that has brought confidence we have a structure that assures the London Society of adequate capital for any co-operative purpose. Steadily, and as surely, the trade and capital is winning its way in every direction. Before the War co-operators were drawn from manual workers mainly; the residents in suburban villas and semi-detached houses were a class apart from those who drew their wages weekly. The salaried persons who took their remuneration in monthly allotments had no concern with those who dwelt in the long rows of houses, all alike. But the War came. It shattered many of the old notions. All sections of the people discovered they were exploited by those who saw in the distribution of commodities a source of profit; they were over-rented by the people who had more capital than their tenants; they were equally the victims of the unsocial conditions of life in which they lived, slept, fed, moved, and had their being. In the common suffering they found the mutual soul of Co-operation.

Just as the L.C.S. unified the supplies of foodstuffs throughout the greater part of the Metropolis, welding the isolated and different municipal and Parliamentary divisions into one composite body of consumers, so it has broken down the unneighbourliness of the suburbs. Women of every social grade meet on terms of equality at their own store and, in the guildrooms where they discuss their economic problems, as housewives and mothers. Men of different occupations and remuneration assemble at the business meetings in the same spirit of Co-operative Consciousness. The committees of the society include professional men, doctors, married women, civil servants, accountants, and manual workers elected by popular vote to secure that the administra-

tion is conducted along lines of continuous Co-operation. There are few comprehensive organisations in the wide world with a membership so representative of every human occupation as is that of the L.C.S.

Two great facts have been established. Firstly, the unrestrained possibilities of the Co-operative Society. Secondly, the Co-operative Consciousness of its members.

Early Co-operators foundered on their poverty ; their successors, the Chartists, came to grief because of the personal animosities of the leaders who lacked the cohesive principle of association and had little more than the ghost of an idea of what they were after. Modern Co-operation in London will not fall between these two stools of impotence. The Education Committee has been at work ; the constructive co-operative statesman has been evolved ; the civic administrator recognises that citizenship and co-operation are twin forces to carry out the wishes of the electors and the members ; the Legislature has been strengthened by the Co-operative M.P.'s—two of them from the L.C.S.—voicing, for the first time, the aspirations of consumers organised for mutual protection and goodwill. Nor must we overlook the fact there are 24 M.P.'s and 50 members of local governing bodies in the membership of the L.C.S. These and the thousands of trade unionists and friendly society adherents who are also in the ranks ensure a power that no previous phase of Co-operation has known ; and their recognition of the collective principle in bargaining, working, and living will secure a Oneness of purpose that will carry us to a pàcific and permanent end.

For all these reasons and circumstances I make bold to say with Browning

The best is yet to be.

A hundred years ago those who illumined the industrial darkness with the clear ray of co-operation visioned the future as possessing a co-operative reposi-



tory in all the main thoroughfares of London. They saw the forest while planting the seedlings.

The dreams that nations dream come true  
And shape the world anew.

The fancies of those who directed the London Co-operative Society of 1827 are being materialised into facts that all can observe by the London Co-operative Society of 1927. True the evidence is not yet complete, but from all the suburban districts the invasion of the central area is proceeding in an ordered fashion.

The old way of haphazardly starting a store in the hope that some fairy wand would make it blossom into favour has gone for ever. For nearly three-quarters of a century recurring groups of co-operators sought to found co-operative societies in the city; visitors from other places looked in vain for co-operative stores in the central region. Then came the new co-operative strength in the suburbs. Co-operation succeeded in the localities where the people lived, and where the wives did the shopping. Gradually it dawned upon these "amateur shopkeepers," as the tradesmen called them, that they must set their shops near the homes tended by the mothers of families. So the last generation left the city and the West End to be overrun by financiers and joint stock companies, trusts, syndicates, and other devices of the investor of capital. Meanwhile in all the suburbs Co-operation has become established. It rears its departmental stores, it acquires other people's businesses when it is ready, it has a "local habitation and a name." L.C.S. shops, vans, and services are as familiar in the urban areas as are L.C.C. trams and inspectors in Metropolitan boroughs.

Now that the circumference has been secured, the trend of progress will be inward to the centre. The new map of London, which the Society is preparing, already indicates vast developments within the next few years. Rome was not built in a day, and the construction of Co-operative London will not be com-

pleted this year. The capital is well on the way; the men and women who have been elected to direct its use have a clear idea of their purpose. They are not likely to be diverted from their great conception. When the amalgamation of the existing societies into the L.C.S. was under discussion regard had to be paid to the available resources and the ultimate end gained by other roads than those first trodden. So, in the development of the Comprehensive Co-operation we seek plans may have to be readjusted, and schemes refashioned to the changing circumstances. Bound by the encircling chain of co-operative trade there will be fostered the great idea of providing a Co-operative Headquarters in London which will be adequate to let those who visit the Capital City realise that the people are co-operatively conscious and, like Owen, have declared for "unrestrained co-operation."

Some day the L.C.S. will provide London with a whole street full of its shops; over the shops will be offices for the co-operative politicians and education-alists; rest rooms for co-operators from the north, and from other lands, visiting the city; there will be a club where men of modest resources may associate in good fellowship without extravagance; there will be hostels for young co-operators who win scholarships at the London School of Economics, and hotels for friends from the provinces and abroad. There will probably be a co-operative cinema concert hall and theatre, giving our people an opportunity for the full expression of the art they now rehearse in the co-operative dramatic societies, guilds, and circles.

Such expansion of Co-operation will not be done alone. For the trade unionists and all who believe in the collective ownership of essential services by co-operators or citizens, are recognising that the development of great schemes must be carried through by those who have experience in the organisation of Business—Big Business and Better Business. Who, in the city

of London, has done that so well as the committee of the L.C.S.? The society is "the incarnation in action" of the principle they have declared as the mainspring of the social and civic life. So the Century of Co-operation in London advances to the next era—out of the tribulations that bring experience, and from the experiences of the new Unity into the hopes of a more co-operative world for the generations that will, in a few years, recall this Story as the chronicle of men and women who worked together for the common good of all the citizens.

"Others I doubt not, if not we,  
The issue of our toils shall see ;  
Young children gather as their own  
The harvest that the dead have sown ;  
The dead—forgotten and unknown."